WHEN ELVIS MET NIXON P. 10 • CLEOPATRA THE GREAT P. 88

Smithsonian

DECEMBER 2010

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ONE WOMAN'S LIFELONG QUEST TO Save the Orangutan

ALSO:

CHINA'S DINOSAURS

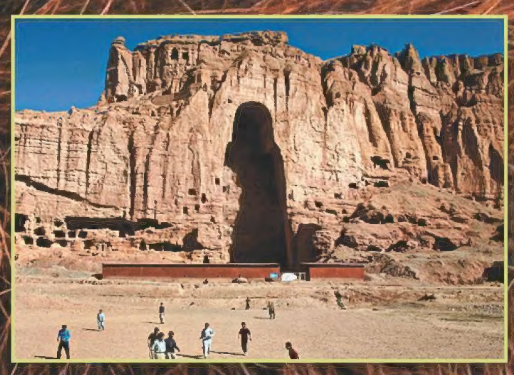
A YULETIDE ACT OF KINDNESS

ALEXIS ROCKMAN

SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

PLUS:

AN ARCHAEOLOGIST IN AFGHANISTAN



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INSET: GORAN TOMASEVIC / REUTERS / CORBIS

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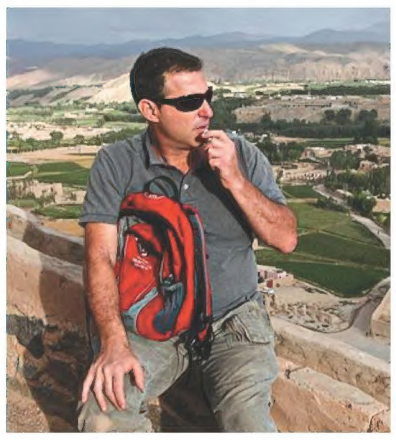
FROM THE EDITOR

Glorious Quests

Impossible dreams and heavenly causes

BY CAREY WINFREY

THIS IS THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE ISSUE in which *Newsweek* correspondent-turned-monumentally-productive-freelancer Joshua Hammer has contributed a feature article to SMITHSONIAN. In the October issue he wrote about the Mafia in Sicily. Last month it was Russia's cult of the czar. In this issue he writes about one man's determined quest to find a giant reclining Buddha buried in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, where, to the world's horror, the Taliban in 2001 dynamited two giant 1,500-year-old standing statues of the Buddha (see "Searching for Buddha," p. 46).



Hammer: Leave them empty.

Hammer says archaeologist Zemaryalai Tarzi "is a passionate, engaging guy with this dream that may be a pipe dream. And in the course of pursuing it, he has peeled though layers of Afghan history."

In addition to profiling Tarzi, Hammer got to know some of the German and Japanese archaeologists and conservationists in Bamiyan who are trying to conserve what's left of the niches in which the Buddhas stood. They are debating whether to rebuild the destroyed statues, a course Hammer fears might well lead to more dynamite. Now that a plan to project laser images onto the empty niches at night has been put on indefinite hold, Hammer says, "just leave them empty as a testament to what happened there."

TED GUP IS A FORMER STAFF WRITER for the *Washington Post* and *Time* who now chairs the journalism department at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts. More important for our purposes, he is the grandson of a long-anonymous benefactor who wrote checks to needy families in his Canton, Ohio, community during the Depression more than 75 Christmases ago. Gup learned of these events only when his mother gave him a battered suitcase containing the canceled checks and the heartbreaking letters that had occasioned them. "The letters were so desperate," says Gup, "that it was just human nature to want to know: Did these people survive? Did times get better for them? What happened to them?"

Gup spent two years answering those questions, using a genealogy Web site, U.S. census reports, death records, city directories, cemetery records, military records and so many interviews that he stopped counting when he reached 500. His inspiring story, "The Gift," begins on page 64.

Smithsonian magazine 8TH ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

ENTRIES FOR SMITHSONIAN'S 8th annual photo contest are due by December 1, 2010, at 2 p.m. E.S.T. Please visit Smithsonian.com/photocontest for details and to enter.

ALEX MASI

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The fig's popularity dates back to ancient times.

LAURENCE MOUTON / PHOTOALTO / CORBIS

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LETTERS READERS RESPOND TO THE **OCTOBER** ISSUE

Las Vegas has a unique heart and soul ["Winner Take All"]. They may be harder to see through all the glitz and glitter than they would be in a Vermont village but are there for the finding.

MIKE HARRINGTON, ISSAQUAH, WASHINGTON

BEYOND THE STRIP

EVIDENTLY J.R. Moehringer ["Winner Take All"] did not try very hard to really understand Las Vegas beyond the glitter, kitsch and sexual lure. He must not have visited such scenic destinations as Red Rock Canyon, Valley of Fire State Park, Mount Charleston or Hoover Dam. He would have seen the beauty of the desert and soaring red cliffs. Had he looked closely into life in the "exurban sprawl," he would have found families, schools, diverse places of worship, museums, parks and libraries. I hope he eventually found a library. The Las Vegas-Clark County Library District has 13 urban branches and 11 rural ones. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas has an outstanding lecture series featuring authors and scholars. As a 27-year resident of Las Vegas, I grow weary of journalists who hype only the glitz and bemoan the cultural desert of Las Vegas without exploring the facts.

REBECCA HRICSINA
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

JAPANESE SNACKS

THERE MIGHT BE SOME misunderstanding about the food mentioned as "a watery egg custard with chicken and mushrooms" ["A Walk Through Old Japan"]. This dish is called *chawan-mushi;* it is a savory egg custard and not a dessert. Usually served as a soup course, it is silky and soft and should be somewhat watery. "Watery" to Americans often means not tasty, but the water in this dish is *dashi*, a flavorful broth traditionally made with fish. Chawan-mushi is a popular dish in Japan, and it is very soothing to a tired body. I also recommend *gohei-mochi* (rice cakes with miso sauce), another popular snack along the Kiso Road. It's a must-try.

KANAKO I. BERINGER
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

A WORD, PLEASE

ADD MY OUTRAGE to Ted Gup's in his humorous essay ["My Big Hang-Up"] about the corruption, perversion and degradation of the English language. I have informed my friends that I will not read any e-mail written with texting shorthand. I love the English language too much to accept its demise at the hands of anti-literate message writers who believe that "4 u 2 no" is equivalent to "For your information."

DAVID KANOWSKY
COTTONWOOD, ARIZONA

I LOVE COMMUNICATIONS technology. I share ideas, plan events, have great conversations and sometimes even tweet about what I had for dinner (if it was a particularly exceptional meal). I have started an international organization through social media, shared an anti-suicide video with teens and recently set up a meeting with my peers on Twitter. Not everyone with his or her head down tapping away at a smartphone or personal digital assistant is spewing garbage.

ERICA FRIEDMAN
MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY

FOUNDING FAITH

KENNETH C. DAVIS' essay "God and Country" included a number of historical events of which I was unaware. His point of view, however, spoiled an otherwise enlightening article. Davis seems to conflate a secular government, which the founding fathers sought to establish, with a secular society, which they clearly did not. Many founding fathers thought religion essential in order for society to regulate itself. They advocated separation of state from church precisely because that was the only way to ensure real religious freedom.

J. PHILLIP MARTIN
MARION, VIRGINIA

ANNE HUTCHINSON rightly deserves recognition for living her religion according to her own conscience, which resulted in her expulsion from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. But let's not overlook the sacrifice made by Mary Dyer, Anne's dear friend. Dyer was hanged in 1660 for refusing to renounce her Quaker faith. She is thought to be the only woman in American history executed because of her religious beliefs.

DOROTHY J. SCHIMMELPFENNIG
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All Shook Up

It was 40 years ago this month that the strangest of bedfellows met in the Oval Office

BY PETER CARLSON

THE IMAGE LOOKS LIKE a computer-generated joke, or maybe a snapshot from some parallel universe where the dead icons of the 20th century hang out together—even Elvis Presley and Richard Nixon.

But the picture is genuine, an official White House photograph of a bizarre encounter that occurred in *this* universe, in the Oval Office on December 21, 1970.

The story began in Memphis a few days earlier, when Elvis' father, Vernon, and wife, Priscilla, complained that he'd spent too much on Christmas presents—more than $100,000 for 32 handguns and ten Mercedes-Benzes. Peeved, Elvis drove to the airport and caught the next available flight, which happened to be bound for Washington. He checked into a hotel, then got bored and decided to fly to Los Angeles.

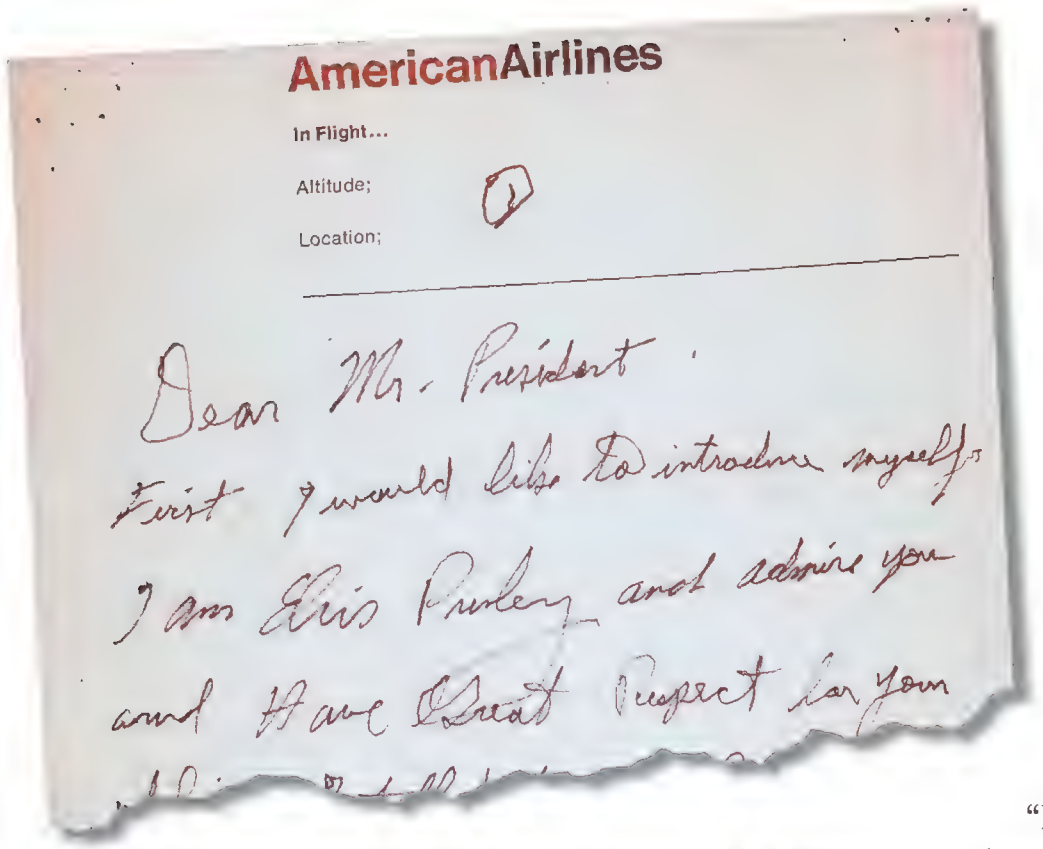
"Elvis called and asked me to pick him up at the airport," recalls Jerry Schilling, Presley's longtime aide, who dutifully arrived at the Los Angeles airport at 3 a.m. to chauffeur the King to his mansion there.

Elvis was traveling with some guns and his collection of police badges, and he decided that what he really wanted was a badge from the federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs back in Washington. "The narc badge represented some kind of ultimate power to him," Priscilla Presley would write in her memoir, *Elvis and Me*. "With the federal narcotics badge, he [believed he] could legally enter any country both wearing guns and carrying any drugs he wished."

After just one day in Los Angeles, Elvis asked Schilling to fly with him back to the capital. "He didn't say why," Schilling recalls, "but I thought the badge might be part of the reason."

On the red-eye to Washington, Elvis scribbled a letter to President Nixon. "Sir, I can and will be of any service that I

"I'm on your side," Elvis told Nixon. Then the singer asked if he could have a badge from the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.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In Flight...

Altitude;

Location;

Dear Mr. President.

First I would like to introduce myself.

I am Elvis Presley and admire you

and have Great Respect for you

Elvis' written request (above) landed on the desk of White House aide Egil "Bud" Krogh, who set up the meeting and was on hand (below) as the president inspected the King's bling.

can to help the country out," he wrote. All he wanted in return was a federal agent's badge. "I would love to meet you," he added, informing Nixon that he'd be staying at the Washington Hotel under the alias Jon Burrows. "I will be here for as long as it takes to get the credentials of a federal agent."

After they landed, Elvis and Schilling took a limo to the White House, and Elvis dropped off his letter at an entrance gate at about 6:30 a.m. Once they checked in at their hotel, Elvis left for the offices of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. He got a meeting with a deputy director, but not approval for a bureau badge.

Meanwhile, his letter was delivered to Nixon aide Egil "Bud" Krogh, who happened to be an Elvis fan. Krogh loved the idea of a Nixon-Presley summit and persuaded his bosses, including White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman, to make it happen. Krogh called the Washington Hotel and set up a meeting through Schilling.

Around noon, Elvis arrived at the White House with Schilling and bodyguard Sonny West, who'd just arrived from Memphis. Arrayed in a purple velvet suit with a huge gold belt buckle and amber sunglasses, Elvis came bearing a gift—a Colt .45 pistol mounted in a display case that Elvis had plucked off the wall of his Los Angeles mansion.

Which the Secret Service confiscated before Krogh escorted Elvis—without his entourage—to meet Nixon.

"When he first walked into the Oval Office, he seemed a little awe-struck," Krogh recalls, "but he quickly warmed to the situation."

While White House photographer Ollie Atkins snapped photographs, the president and the King shook hands. Then Elvis showed off his police badges.

Nixon's famous taping system had not yet been installed, so the conversation wasn't recorded. But Krogh took notes: "Presley indicated that he thought the Beatles had been a real force for anti-American spirit. The President then indicated that those who use drugs are also those in the vanguard of anti-American protest."

"I'm on your side," Elvis told Nixon, adding that he'd been studying the drug culture and Communist brainwashing. Then he asked the president for a badge from the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

"Can we get him a badge?" Nixon asked Krogh.

Krogh said he could, and Nixon ordered it done.

Elvis was ecstatic. "In a surprising, spontaneous gesture," Krogh wrote, Elvis "put his left arm around the President and hugged him."

Before leaving, Elvis asked Nixon to say hello to Schilling and West, and the two men were escorted into the Oval Office. Nixon playfully punched Schilling on the shoulder and gave both men White House cuff links.

"Mr. President, they have wives, too," Elvis said. So Nixon gave them each a White House brooch.

After Krogh took him to lunch at the White House mess, Elvis received his gift—the narc badge.

At Elvis' request, the meeting was kept secret. A year later, columnist Jack Anderson broke the story—"Presley Gets Narcotics Bureau Badge"—but few people seemed to care.

In 1988, years after Nixon resigned and Elvis died of a drug overdose, a Chicago newspaper reported that the National Archives was selling photos of the meeting, and within a week, some 8,000 people requested copies, making the pictures the most requested photographs in Archives history.

These days, the Archives gift shop sells T-shirts, coffee mugs, refrigerator magnets and snow globes emblazoned with the image. And Chris DerDerian, the Archives' director of retail, is thinking of adding an Elvis-Nixon souvenir charm.

Why is the photo so popular? DerDerian figures it's the incongruity: "There's this staid president with this rock 'n' roll figure. It's a powerful image."

Krogh agrees. "It's a jolt seeing them together. Here is the leader of the Western world and the king of rock 'n' roll in the same place, and they're clearly enjoying each other. And you think, 'How can this be?'"

PETER CARLSON *is the author, most recently, of* K Blows Top, *a travelogue on Nikita Khrushchev's 1959 tour of the United States.*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES; OLLIE ATKINS / RICHARD NIXON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM; PP. 10-11 OLLIE ATKINS / RICHARD NIXON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

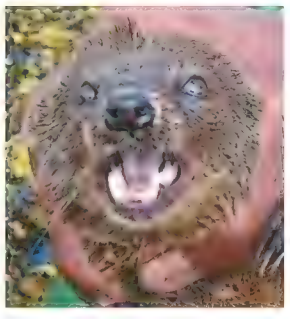
WILD THINGS

LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

BY T.A. FRAIL, MEGAN GAMBINO, JESSE RHODES, ABIGAIL TUCKER AND SARAH ZIELINSKI

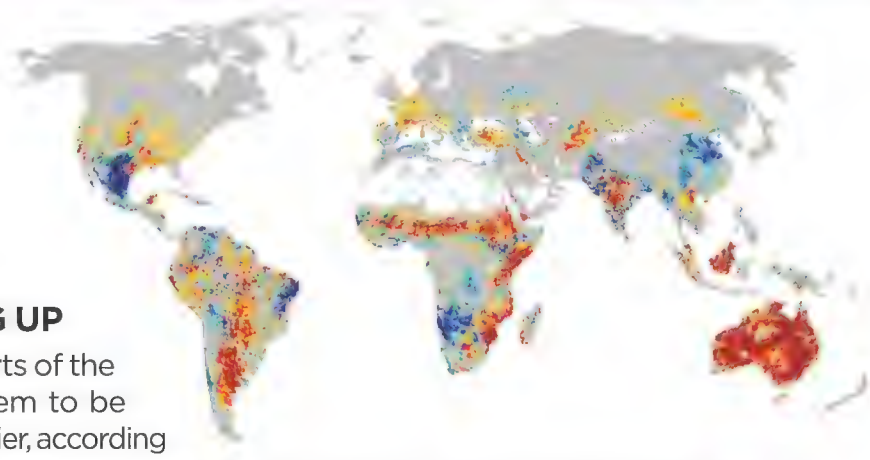
MEAT EATER IDENTIFIED

A mongoose-like creature in Madagascar is the first new member of the carnivore order to be discovered in 24 years. Durrell's vontsira (*Salanoia durrelli*) is a marsh dweller, with large paws for paddling and mighty teeth for crunching shellfish. "It's almost like a ferret becoming an otter," says John Fa, a scientist with the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, which reported the find. Alas, the creature may not be long for this world: much of its wetland habitat has been drained to grow rice.



THE COMEBACK CAT

Wildlife experts who moved eight female panthers from Texas to Florida in 1995 to bolster the dwindling population's genetic diversity now say the experiment has worked. Just a few dozen Florida panthers remained in the wild, and many suffered from heart defects, kinked tails and low fertility. Today, say National Cancer Institute researchers and others, their population has tripled and they show few signs of inbreeding.



DRYING UP

Large parts of the world seem to be getting drier, according to a study led by Germany's Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry. Researchers analyzed 27 years of data from remote sensing devices and meteorological stations. Soil evaporation has been decreasing since 1998, especially in the Southern Hemisphere (above: red means less evaporation, blue more). The authors suggest there's less moisture in the soil—possibly because of climate change—and the trend could harm plants and contribute to heat waves.

RECORD-SETTING SWIM

A female humpback whale first spotted in 1999 off Brazil appeared near Madagascar two years later, according to an analysis of tourist snapshots. That means the whale traveled at least 6,000 miles, a new long-distance record for a wild mammal. Humpbacks migrate thousands of miles between breeding and feeding waters. But this one swam between two far-flung breeding ranges. Either humpbacks are better traveled than scientists believed, or this one took a wrong turn.

Observed

NAME: The mantis shrimp (*Neogonodactylus wennerae*), a coastal crustacean.

EATS: Snails, blasting open their shells with a "raptorial appendage," a spring-loaded hammer-arm that slices through seawater at up to 50 mph.

FIGHTS: To protect its burrow from other shrimp. They trade ritual blows to the tail that would shatter mollusk shells or crab carapaces.

LIVES: Because its tail dissipates almost 70 percent of a blow's energy. How? A study from the University of California at Berkeley shows that the tail absorbs the force like a punching bag, rather than deflecting it like a trampoline. The punches may help shrimp size up opponents.

DAVID IRVING; MAP: GUILBERT GATES (ADAPTED BY PERMISSION FROM MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS, LTD: [NATURE PUBLISHING GROUP], 2010); DURRELL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION TRUST; FLIP NICKLIN / MINDEN PICTURES (NMFS PERMIT #987); ROY CALDWELL

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DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

60-minute guides to top museums

#3 in a series

Inspiration and Accomplishment Tour

Located in the vibrant Arts District of downtown Dallas, Texas, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) ranks among the leading art institutions in the country and is distinguished by its innovative exhibitions, groundbreaking educational programs, and encyclopedic collection. A catalyst for community creativity, the Museum welcomes more than a half-million visitors annually and engages people of all ages and backgrounds with arts and cultures from around the world.

Your Guide

Bonnie Pitman, The Eugene McDermott Director
Dallas Museum of Art

DallasMuseumofArt.org

1717 North Harwood Street, Dallas, TX 75201

214-922-1200

Tuesday through Sunday:
11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

Thursday: 11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.

Closed Mondays

Eiffel Tower

Robert Delaunay, 1885–1941

On view in the recently opened *Encountering Space* exhibition, this work explores how artists use point of view to create interest in a work of art. Visitors can explore the unique perspective Delaunay chose as he painted the Eiffel Tower as if he were a bird flying over this iconic Parisian structure.

Location: Level 1, The Museum's Center for Creative Connections

Shiva Nataraja

India, 11th century Bronze

In the Hindu tradition, music and dance are pathways to divinity. The Hindu god Shiva is not only Lord of the Dance but also the deity of creation, destruction, and rebirth. Embodying the energy of the entire cosmos, Shiva dances the rhythm of the universe, surrounded by flames.

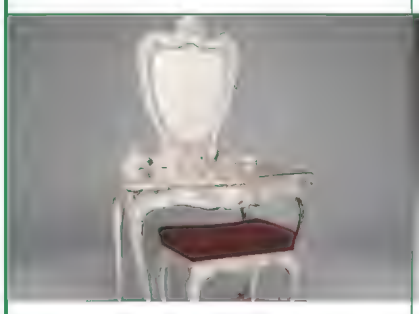
Location: Level 3, Indonesian Galleries

Sheaves of Wheat

Vincent van Gogh, 1890

Van Gogh's *Sheaves of Wheat* is one of 1,400 works of art displayed in the Wendy and Emery Reves Collection, celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2010. This painting depicts the wheat harvest in the region of Vexin, France, and is one of only 13 large canvases of a double-square format painted by the impressionist master.

Location: Level 3, The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection

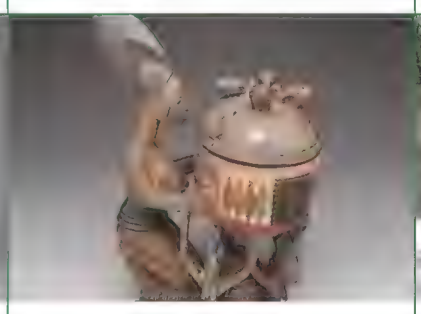


Martelé Dressing Table and Stool

William C. Codman, Gorham Manufacturing Company, Providence, Rhode Island, 1899

Created for the 1900 World's Fair in Paris, this table and stool are considered by scholars to be the most important examples of Martelé silver ever made. The set is constructed from 1,253 troy ounces of silver.

Location: Level 4, American Painting and Decorative Arts

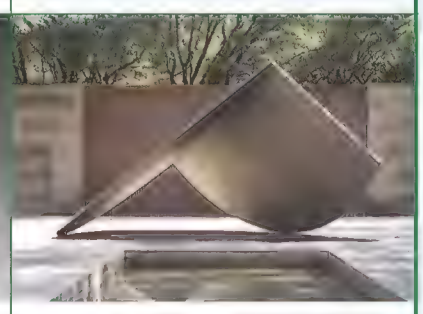


Kneeling Female Figure with Bowl (olumeye)

c. 1910 to c. 1918

Olumeye hold kola nuts offered to visitors in a hospitality ritual or to deities. Unlike conventional olumeye, this one by the African sculptor Olowe of Ise celebrates Yoruba aesthetic of feminine beauty.

Location: Level 3, Arts of Sub-Saharan Africa



Untitled

Ellsworth Kelly, 1982–83, stainless steel

Ellsworth Kelly created this sculpture for the opening of the new Dallas Museum of Art building in 1984. This stainless steel sculpture, sometimes called a "rocker," is made of two segments of a circle, joined at the top.

Location: Level 1, Sculpture Garden

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READER CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR WEB SITE

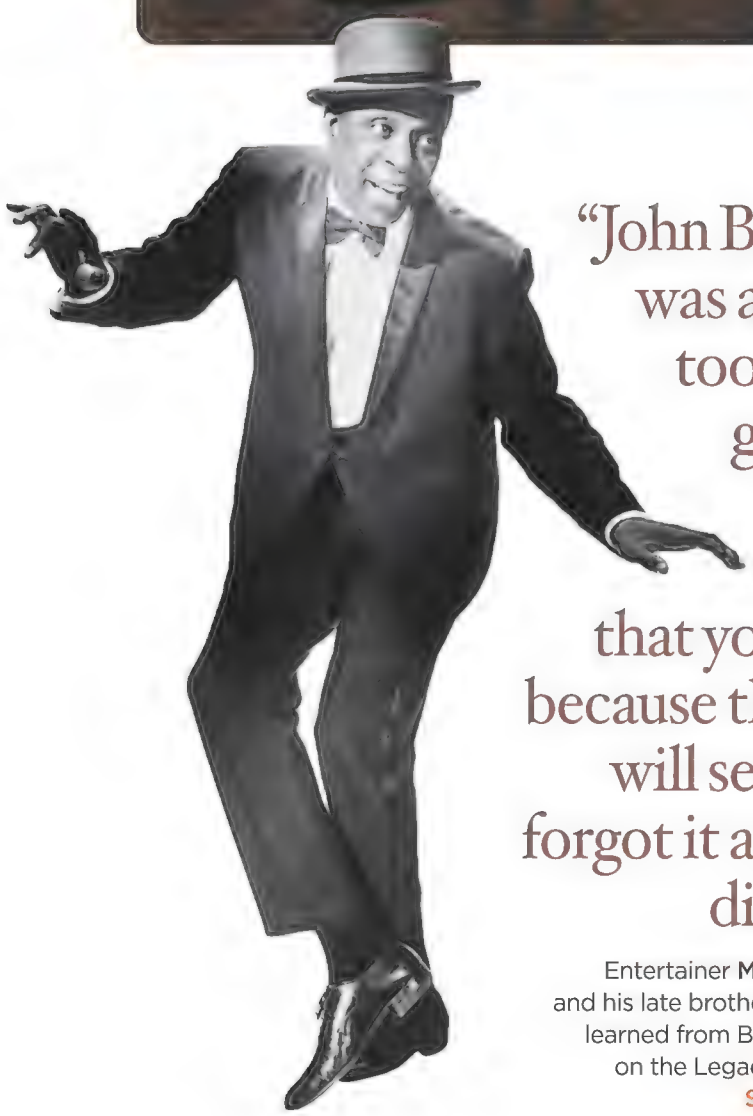
YOUR KIND OF TOWN

PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA

BY LAWRENCE PRATT

WE MOVED to Petaluma when I was 10, and though I set out on my own at 21, I've always considered this small city my hometown. It was a quintessential Main Street USA kind of place (here: a parade reminiscent of the 1973 movie *American Graffiti*, filmed in the city). Much has changed, but icons such as the town clock, a Carnegie library (now the town museum), iron-front buildings on Western Avenue and seemingly countless Victorian homes endure. There's even a functioning water fountain donated by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the 1890s.

Submit a Your Kind of Town story or photograph and find others at Smithsonian.com/yourkindoftown



RHYTHM KING

"John Bubbles [left] was a tap dancer, too, one of the greatest. He said, 'Never do a step that you don't love because the audience will see it.' I never forgot it and Gregory didn't either."

Entertainer **Maurice Hines**, on what he and his late brother, dancer Gregory Hines, learned from Bubbles, in "Maurice Hines on the Legacy of the Apollo Theater" Smithsonian.com/hines

FRESH THINKING

"School gardens are much more popular than this piece makes them sound. We have more than 2,000 school gardens in California alone. I hope these outdoor classrooms sprout up everywhere."

Briana Lewis, of Costa Mesa, California, on "A Showcase School Garden in D.C.," Food & Think blog Smithsonian.com/schoolgardens

MARK ARONOFF / SANTA ROSA PRESS DEMOCRAT / ZUMA PRESS; EVERETT COLLECTION; PETER BENNETT / GREEN STOCK PHOTOS

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University-of-Virginia

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[1] *Caring for Healthcare Workers: A Global Perspective,* 2007, [2] *FORTUNE*, March 2010, [3] *Ethisphere™ Magazine,* April 2010
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Photo ©Marianne Smith/BD

Cave bears loomed large in the Cro-Magnon mind (a Chauvet cave painting).

Fate of the Cave Bear

The lumbering beasts coexisted with the first humans for tens of thousands of years and then died off. Why? **BY ANDREW CURRY**

HERVÉ BOCHERENS says his colleagues find his research methods a little "crude." He dissolves 30,000-year-old animal bones in hydrochloric acid strong enough to burn through metal, soaks the bone solution in lye, cooks it at about 200 degrees Fahrenheit and freeze-dries it until what's left is a speck of powder weighing less than one one-hundredth of an ounce. The method may be harsh, but the yield is precious—the chemical biography of a cave bear.

Bocherens, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Tübingen, Germany, is in the vanguard of research on the bear, a European species that died out 25,000 years ago. People have been excavating cave bear remains for hundreds of years—in the Middle Ages, the massive skulls were attributed to dragons—but the past decade has seen a burst of discoveries about how the bears lived and why they went extinct. An abundance of bear bones has been found from Spain to Romania in caves where the animals once hibernated. "Caves are good places to preserve bones, and cave bears had the good sense to die there," Bocherens says.

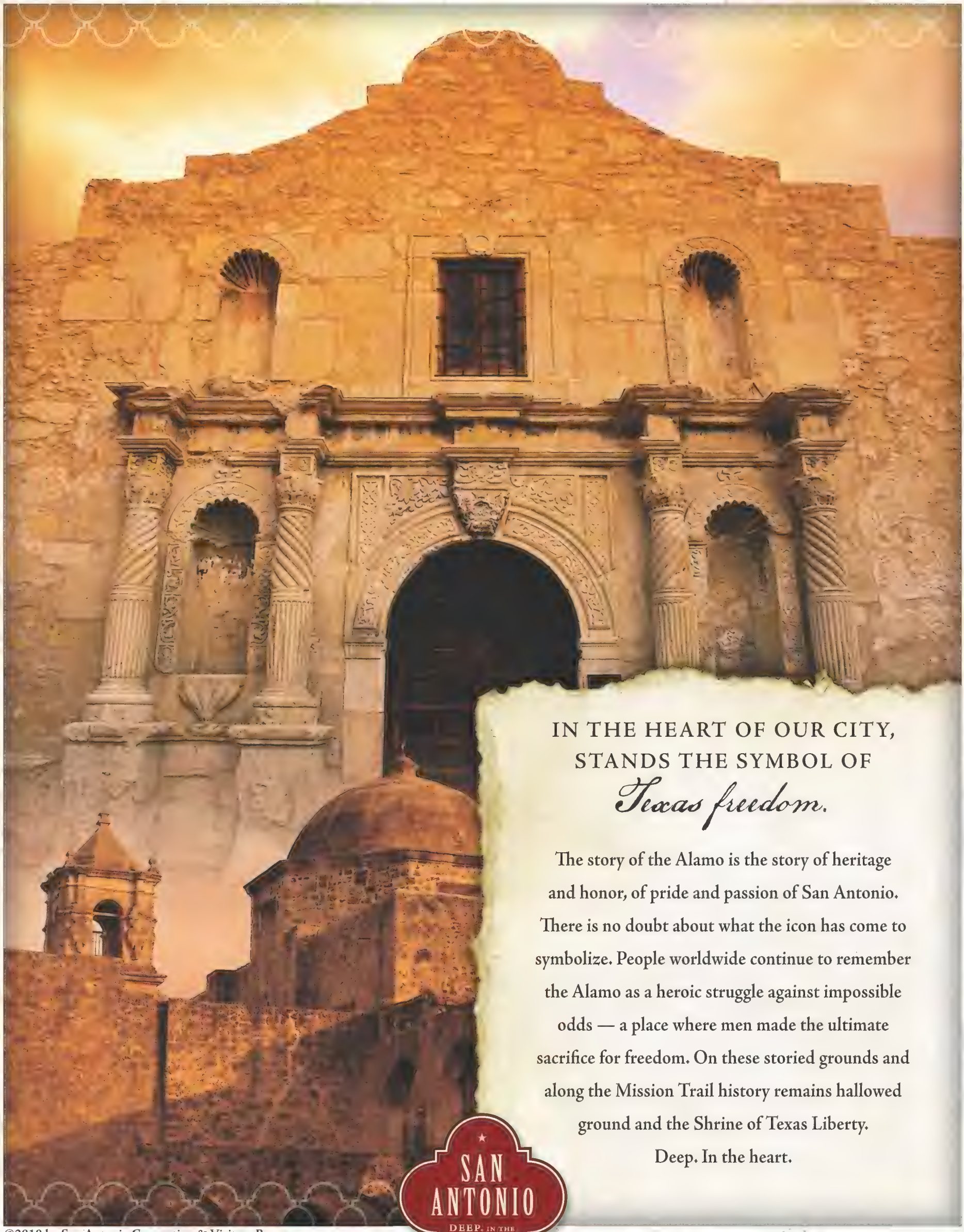
Along with mammoths, lions and woolly rhinos, cave bears (*Ursus spelaeus*) were once among Europe's most impressive creatures. Males weighed up to 1,500 pounds, 50 percent more than the largest modern grizzlies. Cave bears had wider heads than today's bears, and powerful shoulders and forelimbs.

Prehistoric humans painted images of the animals on cave walls and carved their likeness in fragments of mammoth tusk. But the relationship between humans and cave bears has been mysterious. Were humans prey for the bears, or predators? Were bears objects of worship or fear?

Cave bears evolved in Europe more than 100,000 years ago. Initially they shared the continent with Neanderthals. For a time, archaeologists thought Neanderthals worshiped the bears, or even shared caves with them. The idea was popularized by Jean Auel's 1980 novel, *The Clan of the Cave Bear,* but has since been rejected by researchers.

Modern humans arrived in Europe about 40,000 years ago and were soon aware of the bears. The walls of France's Chauvet cave, occupied 32,000 years ago, are painted with lions, hyenas and bears—perhaps the oldest paintings in the world.

JEAN CLOTTES



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The artists weren't the cave's only occupants: the floor is covered with 150 cave bear skeletons, and its soft clay still holds paw prints as well as indentations where bears apparently slept. Most dramatically, a cave bear skull was perched on a stone slab in the center of one chamber, placed deliberately by some long-gone cave inhabitant with opposable thumbs. "There's no way to tell if it was just curiosity that made someone put a skull on the rock or if it had religious significance," says Bocherens.

Another discovery, hundreds of miles to the east of Chauvet, would shed light on the relationship between cave bears and humans.

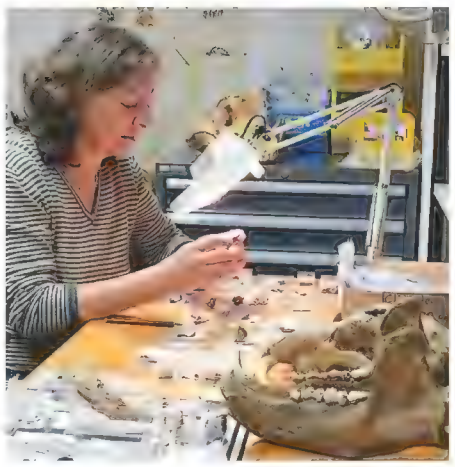
The Swabian Jura is a limestone plateau in southwestern Germany that is riddled with caves. A short walk from the village of Schelklingen takes visitors to the foot of a limestone cliff in the Ach Valley. A steel gate guards the Hohle Fels cave from vandals and curiosity-seekers. Inside, the sound of dripping water competes with the quiet conversation of a half-dozen archaeologists.

Floodlights in the cave's main chamber illuminate the ceiling, vaulted like a cathedral above 5,000 square feet of floor space. Long ago, as shown by the bones and tools that archaeologists have found, cave bears and human beings sought shelter here from winter weather.

In 2000, University of Tübingen paleobiologist Susanne Münzel unearthed a bear vertebra with a tiny triangular piece of flint embedded in it. The stone was likely a broken spear point, hard evidence of a successful bear hunt 29,000 years ago.

Münzel also found bear bones that had clearly been scratched and scraped by stone tools. Cut marks on skulls and leg bones showed that the bears had been skinned and their flesh cut away. "There must have been cave bear hunting, otherwise you wouldn't find meat cut off the bone," she says. Many of the bones were from baby bears, perhaps caught while hibernating.

Cave bears disappeared not long after humans spread throughout Europe. Could hunting have led to the bears' extinction? That's not likely, according to Washington University at St. Louis anthropologist Erik Trinkaus. "People living in the late Pleistocene weren't stupid," he says. "They spent an awful lot of time avoiding being eaten, and one of the ways to do that is to stay away from big bears." If hunting was an isolated event, as he argues, there must be another reason the bears died out.



Susanne Münzel (top left) has found cave bear bones with scratches and gouges (above left), indicating humans butchered the animals. But did bears eat humans? Hervé Bocherens (above right: in Mont Ventoux cave) says they mainly ate plants.

Hervé Bocherens' test tubes may hold the clues. Running his white powder through a mass spectrometer, he identifies different isotopes, or chemical forms, of elements such as carbon and nitrogen that reflect what the bears were eating and how quickly they grew. After studying hundreds of bones from dozens of sites in Europe, Bocherens has found that cave bears mainly ate plants.

That would have made the bears particularly vulnerable to the last ice age, which began around 30,000 years ago. The prolonged cold period shortened or eliminated growing seasons and changed the distributions of plant species across Europe. Cave bears began to move from their old territories, according to a DNA analysis led by researchers at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig of teeth found near the Danube River. The cave bear population there was relatively stable for perhaps 100,000 years, with the same genetic patterns showing up generation after generation. But about 28,000 years ago, newcomers with different DNA patterns arrived—a possible sign of hungry bears suddenly on the move.

But climate change can't be solely to blame for the bears' extinction. According to the latest DNA study, a Max Planck Institute collaboration including Bocherens, Münzel and Trinkaus, cave bear populations began a long, slow decline 50,000 years ago—well before the last ice age began.

The new study does support a different explanation for the cave bear's demise. As cave*men*—Neanderthals and then a growing population of modern humans—moved into the caves of Europe, cave *bears* had fewer safe places to hibernate. An acute housing shortage may have been the final blow for these magnificent beasts.

ANDREW CURRY *writes frequently about archaeology and history for* SMITHSONIAN.

UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN (3)

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Like all prescription NSAIDs, CELEBREX may increase the chance of heart attack or stroke that can lead to death. This chance increases if you have heart disease or risk factors for it, such as high blood pressure or when NSAIDs are taken for long periods.

CELEBREX should not be used right before or after certain heart surgeries.

Serious skin reactions, or stomach and intestine problems such as bleeding and ulcers, can occur without warning and may cause death. Patients taking aspirin and the elderly are at increased risk for stomach bleeding and ulcers.

Tell your doctor if you have: a history of ulcers or bleeding in the stomach or intestines; high blood pressure or heart failure; or kidney or liver problems.

CELEBREX should not be taken in late pregnancy.

Do not take CELEBREX if you've had an asthma attack, hives, or other allergic reactions to aspirin, any other NSAID medicine or certain drugs called sulfonamides.

Life threatening allergic reactions can occur with CELEBREX. Get help right away if you've had swelling of the face or throat or trouble breathing.

Prescription CELEBREX should be used exactly as prescribed at the lowest dose possible and for the shortest time needed.

See the Medication Guide on the next page for important information about Celebrex and other prescription NSAIDs.

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Medication Guide
for Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)
(See the end of this Medication Guide for a list of prescription NSAID medicines.)

What is the most important information I should know about medicines called Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?

NSAID medicines may increase the chance of a heart attack or stroke that can lead to death.
This chance increases:
- with longer use of NSAID medicines
- in people who have heart disease

NSAID medicines should never be used right before or after a heart surgery called a "coronary artery bypass graft (CABG)."
NSAID medicines can cause ulcers and bleeding in the stomach and intestines at any time during treatment. Ulcers and bleeding:
- can happen without warning symptoms
- may cause death

The chance of a person getting an ulcer or bleeding increases with:
- taking medicines called "corticosteroids" and "anticoagulants"
- longer use
- smoking
- drinking alcohol
- older age
- having poor health

NSAID medicines should only be used:
- exactly as prescribed
- at the lowest dose possible for your treatment
- for the shortest time needed

What are Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?
NSAID medicines are used to treat pain and redness, swelling, and heat (inflammation) from medical conditions such as:
- different types of arthritis
- menstrual cramps and other types of short-term pain

Who should not take a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID)?
Do not take an NSAID medicine:
- if you had an asthma attack, hives, or other allergic reaction with aspirin or any other NSAID medicine
- for pain right before or after heart bypass surgery

Tell your healthcare provider:
- about all of your medical conditions.
- about all of the medicines you take. NSAIDs and some other medicines can interact with each other and cause serious side effects. **Keep a list of your medicines to show to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.**
- if you are pregnant. **NSAID medicines should not be used by pregnant women late in their pregnancy.**
- if you are breastfeeding. **Talk to your doctor.**

What are the possible side effects of Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)?

Serious side effects include:	**Other side effects include:**
• heart attack • stroke • high blood pressure • heart failure from body swelling (fluid retention) • kidney problems including kidney failure • bleeding and ulcers in the stomach and intestine • low red blood cells (anemia) • life-threatening skin reactions • life-threatening allergic reactions • liver problems including liver failure • asthma attacks in people who have asthma	• stomach pain • constipation • diarrhea • gas • heartburn • nausea • vomiting • dizziness

Get emergency help right away if you have any of the following symptoms:
- shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- chest pain
- weakness in one part or side of your body
- slurred speech
- swelling of the face or throat

Stop your NSAID medicine and call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms:
- nausea
- more tired or weaker than usual
- itching
- your skin or eyes look yellow
- stomach pain
- flu-like symptoms
- vomit blood
- there is blood in your bowel movement or it is black and sticky like tar
- skin rash or blisters with fever
- unusual weight gain
- swelling of the arms and legs, hands and feet

These are not all the side effects with NSAID medicines. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information about NSAID medicines.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

Other information about Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)
- Aspirin is an NSAID medicine but it does not increase the chance of a heart attack. Aspirin can cause bleeding in the brain, stomach, and intestines. Aspirin can also cause ulcers in the stomach and intestines.
- Some of these NSAID medicines are sold in lower doses without a prescription (over-the-counter). Talk to your healthcare provider before using over-the-counter NSAIDs for more than 10 days.

NSAID medicines that need a prescription

Generic Name	Tradename
Celecoxib	Celebrex
Diclofenac	Cataflam, Voltaren, Arthrotec (combined with misoprostol)
Diflunisal	Dolobid
Etodolac	Lodine, Lodine XL
Fenoprofen	Nalfon, Nalfon 200
Flurbiprofen	Ansaid
Ibuprofen	Motrin, Tab-Profen, Vicoprofen* (combined with hydrocodone), Combunox (combined with oxycodone)
Indomethacin	Indocin, Indocin SR, Indo-Lemmon, Indomethagan
Ketoprofen	Oruvail
Ketorolac	Toradol
Mefenamic Acid	Ponstel
Meloxicam	Mobic
Nabumetone	Relafen
Naproxen	Naprosyn, Anaprox, Anaprox DS, EC-Naproxyn, Naprelan, Naprapac (copackaged with lansoprazole)
Oxaprozin	Daypro
Piroxicam	Feldene
Sulindac	Clinoril
Tolmetin	Tolectin, Tolectin DS, Tolectin 600

*Vicoprofen contains the same dose of ibuprofen as over-the-counter (OTC) NSAIDs, and is usually used for less than 10 days to treat pain. The OTC NSAID label warns that long term continuous use may increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

This Medication Guide has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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Around the Mall

SCENES AND SIGHTINGS FROM THE SMITHSONIAN MUSEUMS AND BEYOND

From the Castle p. 26
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"We humans, when we work together, can do amazing things," says exhibit mastermind Margaret Wertheim of the Institute for Figuring in Los Angeles.

HOOKED ON CORAL

HANDICRAFT, MATHEMATICS, BIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT COME TOGETHER TO CREATE THE "HYPERBOLIC CROCHET CORAL REEF," ON VIEW AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S SANT OCEAN HALL

PAGE 28

STEPHEN VOSS

Up With Science

BY G. WAYNE CLOUGH

ATLANTA'S HUGE Hartsfield-Jackson airport is one of the world's busiest; each year 82 million passengers go through it. And it is but one of more than 1,000 sites worldwide—such as public parks, metro stations, arts festivals, libraries and hospitals—where people can see spectacular astronomical images provided by the award-winning From Earth to the Universe, a project of the Chandra group at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory.

Especially after World War II, America's leaders came to understand the importance of science and technology. The National Science Foundation, founded in 1950, offered increased funding to universities and nonprofit organizations. Sputnik's 1957 launch further stimulated research investment. By 1958, total federal funding for scientific research and development was $7 billion. The U.S. government now spends more than $100 billion on R&D; the private sector invests another $290 billion or so. Science and technology underpin our country's success in global competition. The Internet, space exploration and other key advances were spawned by past investments in science.

Wanted: new tools (Smithsonian's Solar System tutorial) for learning science.

Yet our country faces many critical decisions. How do we handle climate change and other environmental challenges? How much should we invest in alternative fuels? How will we repair our decaying infrastructure? Finding answers will require in-depth public understanding of science and technology. But polls suggest that scientific literacy is on the wane, and science education is declining. Our K-12 mathematics and science education ranks 48th worldwide, while 49 percent of U.S. adults don't know how long it takes for Earth to circle the Sun (a year). Science and engineering are devolving into ever-smaller specialties, and few scientists and engineers effectively communicate the broader contexts of key issues.

To increase scientific literacy, partnerships of government agencies like NSF and NASA with universities, science museums, corporations and science and engineering associations are essential. New strategic search tools will also be needed to explore general information—not just the specialized knowledge that only a few understand—about science and technology. The Smithsonian Natural History Museum's Ocean Portal and Human Origins Web sites are good examples of such tools.

The Smithsonian must play a central role in a coordinated national effort to foster scientific literacy, and involve all of our K-12 science programs, including those in our various museums, research centers and the National Zoo. By promoting scientific literacy and convening key partners to address the critical issues of our time, we will enhance 21st-century relevance for the Smithsonian's enduring mission—the increase and diffusion of knowledge.

G. WAYNE CLOUGH *is Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.*

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BBC EARTH

How to Crochet a Coral Reef

A ball of yarn could go a long way toward saving endangered sea life

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S Baird Auditorium showcases scientists and performers from around the world. One day it might be a lecture on evolution, the next a Puerto Rican dance recital. On this particular rainy fall afternoon, however, the auditorium is quiet—though not for lack of activity. More than 100 women, from young girls to grandmothers, are deftly manipulating crochet hooks, winding together brightly colored yarn, lanyard string, old curtain tassels, plastic bags and even unwound audiocassette tape.

As the forms begin to take shape, they reveal frilly, crenulated structures that will be displayed alongside the "Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef" exhibit, now on view in Natural History's Sant Ocean Hall.

"We started off with something very simple, and then we started deviating, morphing the code," says exhibit director Margaret Wertheim, 52, about the coral reef, as she watches the crocheters from the stage.

Wertheim, an Australian-born science journalist, first began crocheting with her artist sister Christine in 2003 to try her hand at modeling hyperbolic space—the mind-bending geometry discovered by mathematicians in the early 19th century. Whereas conventional geometry describes shapes on a flat plane, hyperbolic geometry is set on a curved surface—creating configurations that defy the mathematical theorems discovered by Euclid some 2,000 years ago. Variations of hyperbolic space can be found in nature (the wavy edges of sea kelp, for example), but mathematicians scratched their heads trying to find a simple way to fabricate a physical model. Finally, in 1997, mathematician Daina Taimina realized that the crochet stitch that women have used for centuries to create ruffled garments represents this complex geometry.

Having grown up in Queensland, where the Great Barrier Reef lies offshore, the Wertheim sisters were astonished to learn that their crocheted models looked a lot like another example of hyperbolic geometry in nature. "We had them sitting on our coffee table," says Wertheim, "and we looked at them and said, 'Oh my gosh, they look like a coral reef. We could crochet a coral reef.'"

The exhibit first appeared at Pittsburgh's Andy Warhol Museum in 2007. And wherever it goes, Wertheim encourages the local community to create its own reef. Among the contributors are churches, synagogues, schools, retirement homes, charities and even government agencies.

Curators and scientists attribute the reef's popularity to its unique combination of marine biology, exotic math, traditional handicraft, conservation and community. "All these different elements are bubbling on the stove together," says Smithsonian biologist Nancy Knowlton. "For different people, there are different parts of it that really resonate."

Like the Wertheims' exhibit, the contribution from Washington, D.C. residents is divided into sections. A vibrant "healthy" reef is organized roughly by color and species (a green crocheted kelp garden, for example); a "bleached reef" is made up of pale, neutral colors—which represent coral subjected to pollution and rising water temperatures, provoking a stress response that drains the coral's bright hues. In addition to yarn, the crocheters use recycled materials (such as the cassette tapes and plastic bags) to call attention to the excessive human waste that accumulates in the ocean.

More than 800 people, ages 3 to 101, crocheted the individual pieces that make up the coral reef (above) currently on view.

Wertheim says it would be hubristic to claim that her project alone could make people care about endangered reefs. Yet the last three years have brightened her outlook.

"A reef is made up of billions of coral polyps," she says. "Each one of these is completely insignificant individually, but collectively, they make up something as magnificent as the Great Barrier Reef. We humans, when we work together, can do amazing things."

JESS RIGHTHAND

INSTITUTE FOR FIGURING / NMNH, SI

Watch how the reef was made at Smithsonian.com/crochet

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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY • **DOLLHOUSE**

Deck the Halls

All the trimmings—in miniature—wreathe a Victorian-style dollhouse in Christmas cheer **BY OWEN EDWARDS**

Bradford (left: c. 1900; right: at the Smithsonian, 1966) put her "passion for detail" in the service of a miniature world.

AS THE 1951 Christmas season approached, Faith Bradford, a retired librarian, came to the Smithsonian Institution to carry out what would become a holiday ritual. Bradford, a passionate dollhouse enthusiast who had amassed miniature furnishings and household items since childhood, had recently donated her collection—a 23-room dwelling furnished with 1,354 items of early 20th-century vintage—to the Institution. The house's inhabitants included a father, called Peter Doll by Bradford; his wife, Rose Washington Doll; their ten children; the couple's in-laws; a household staff of five; and 20 pets, ranging from dogs to goldfish and including several presumably tame white rats.

On that December day, Bradford had come to decorate the five-story house for the holidays. Down from the attic came tiny wreaths, as well as a fir tree fashioned of brush bristles and festooned with ornaments; elegantly wrapped miniature presents; and a scaled-down electric train set. Ever since, Bradford's house has been a crowd pleaser, particularly at holiday time. Her great-nephew Phillips V. Bradford, who lives in Colorado, visits the installation, now at the National Museum of American History, whenever he is in Washington, though not without difficulty. "I can never get very close," he says. "There's always a crowd three or four deep."

NMAH curator William L. Bird, whose book on the Bradford collection, *America's Dollhouse*, was published in October by Princeton Architectural Press, describes the miniature mansion as "an iconic object, one of the Smithsonian's most popular attractions." Before she retired, Bird notes, Faith Bradford "was the first woman to head a division of the Library of Congress, the Card Catalogue Division."

In her meticulous scrapbook filled with neatly typed entries, she described Peter Doll as "about thirty-five years old. He is successful financially, with perhaps an inheritance as a solid background. He is a man of integrity, well regarded in his community, much loved by his family." She further reported him to be "well-educated; witness his well-stocked library" and fond of sports—"by token of the trophy on his desk and his bicycle." His wife, Rose, "retains her charm at thirty-one. She has lost none of her social ease while acquiring the skills needed to direct her

Bradford saw the dollhouse (decorated for Christmas) as ever evolving: "I shall never be *completely* satisfied with its creation."

FAITH BRADFORD COLLECTION / NMAH, SI (2); HUGH TALMAN, SI

Hear the curator reveal more at Smithsonian.com/dollhouse

large household." Even the goldfish had names—Goldie, Wiggle and Dart—though "no one knows which is which," says Bird. The children, we learn from Bradford's notes, include two sets of twins: Jimmy and Timmy are identical; Carol and Lucy are fraternal. The nanny, Bradford wrote, "is a Scot." The butler is named Gadsby. One of the dogs answers to Spot.

The attention to detail that Bradford lavished on the project is apparent in each room, where her eye for color, texture and minutiae is evident at every turn. The kitchen icebox holds tiny milk bottles; a miniature smoked ham hangs on the wall. The library contains titles including *Washington's Farewell Address*; a silver canister on a shelf represents a souvenir of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago. But for all its wealth of objects, the house—as Bradford admitted in the early 1950s—remained a work in progress. "My passion for detail is such," she wrote, "that I shall never be *completely* satisfied with its creation."

Until her final days, Bradford, who died in 1970 at age 90, returned a couple of times each year to conduct what she described as "house cleanings" (by which she meant thorough dustings). Without fail, the winter tidyings-up coincided with holiday decorating. Nearly six decades after the house first went on view, it still does. "At first," says Bird—recalling his reaction upon joining the museum in 1976—"I thought the tradition odd." But after a couple of years, he adds, the task "became something I looked forward to."

Bird acknowledges, however, that he isn't always punctual when it comes to removing the Christmas trimmings and returning them to the dollhouse attic. On one occasion, he recalls, "My boss, Margaret Brown Klapthor, asked me when the decorations were coming down. I replied that the Dolls left them up until the Super Bowl." To Bird's delight, he says, "She seemed perfectly content with my answer."

OWEN EDWARDS *is a freelance writer and author of the book* Elegant Solutions.

ELIZABETH LIPPMAN / CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

Q&A

TIM GUNN is chief creative officer at Liz Claiborne Inc. and co-host of Lifetime TV's "Project Runway." He delivered the keynote address at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum's Teen Design Fair in October. He spoke with the magazine's Megan Gambino.

How do you recognize good design?
It's largely visceral, to be perfectly honest. If my brain tells me that a new design should resonate with me, but I'm unmoved, then I always go with my gut. I was talking to faculty members at the Parsons School for Design, where I taught for 24 years. They were telling me about how they initially evaluate a new object. They come upon it not really looking at it. They see it in the periphery of their vision and then they look at it for a split second and close their eyes. It's that moment of reckoning that tells them the value of the object.

Your mantra on "Project Runway" is "Make it work." What does that mean exactly?
"Make it work" was born in my classrooms. It came from teaching students who, in the course of working through a particular project, were unhappy with how it was evolving. They were inclined to abandon the entire effort and start again from scratch. I would never let them do that. I would say, let's study this. You study it, you bring your own critical analysis and objectivity to it, offer up a diagnosis of what's wrong with it and then offer a prescription for how to make it work. Doing so provides the individual with a whole set of resources to draw upon when moving forward to the next project. It's about problem solving. And it's a skill that's not just applied to design projects, but to how we navigate life.

What impact has "Project Runway" had on the fashion world?
Initially, the show was very polarizing in the fashion industry. The designers responded well to it. They thought, my family who doesn't really understand all this can say, "Oh my God, is this what you go through?" The fashion magazine editors felt different. They were very invested in the mystique that enshrouded the fashion world. "Project Runway" ripped the veil off and said, here, look at it. It's gritty. It's daunting. It's dirty.

What current teenage fashion trend irks you the most?
Too much skin; especially bare midriffs. I find it distasteful. And I tell them so. Clothes are a form of semiotics. They send a message, and it's important to accept responsibility for that.

Read more of our interview with Tim Gunn at Smithsonian.com/gunn

What's Up

OUT IN THE OPEN

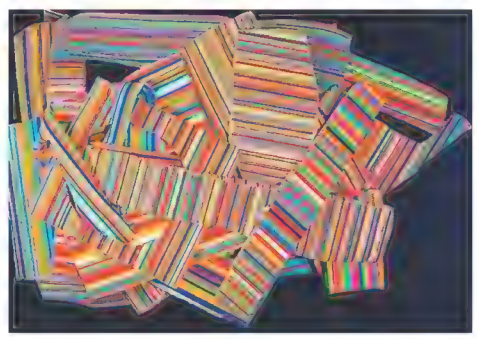
"Hide/Seek," at the Portrait Gallery through February 13, 2011, surveys gay and lesbian portraiture and artists, including Walt Whitman (right: 1891), whose poems reflected the belief that love and sexuality have no natural boundaries.

AFRICAN MOSAIC

Curators at the African Art Museum selected 112 objects (right: Nigerian mask, 20th century) representing a decade-long effort to build a permanent collection. See the artifacts they chose, through December 11, 2011.

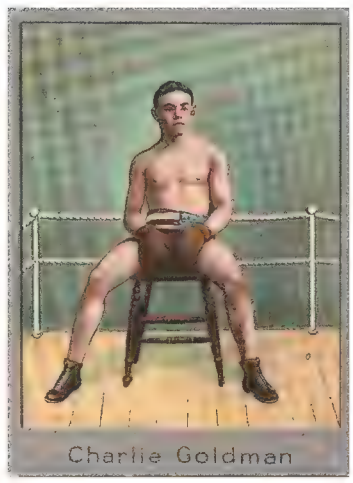
SOUTHERN IDENTITY

The largest survey of contemporary Argentine art ever assembled in the United States brings together 80 works by 32 artists (right: *Geometría Blanda* by Marta Minujín) at the Ripley Center through January 23, 2011.



JEWISH HERITAGE

The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, a Smithsonian affiliate, opened this past November. Exhibits chronicle 350 years of life in the New World (right: world champion trainer Charlie Goldman, c. 1911).



GOING GREEN

Hidden from public view for nearly a decade, a collection of some of the world's oldest and most intricately carved jade and bronze works is back on permanent display at the Freer Gallery. The exhibit features 120 artistic creations—dating as far back as 5,300 years—collected in the early 20th century by gallery founder Charles Lang Freer (right: Chinese ceremonial ax, bronze with turquoise inlay and jade handle, c. 13th century B.C.).

BY JESS RIGHTHAND

VISIT THE SMITHSONIAN For a free Associates' planning packet, call 202 633-1000 or 202 357-1729 (TTY), 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Or send an e-mail to info@si.edu. The Smithsonian Information Center in the Castle is open daily, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Members can visit the reception desk between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to register for a behind-the-scenes tour and to hear about membership benefits. Most museums are open daily, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. All museums are closed December 25.

Get an insider's look at the Smithsonian at Smithsonian.com/mallblog

THOMAS COWPERTHWAITE EAKINS / NPG, SI; NMAFA, SI; FREER GALLERY OF ART, SI; MARTA MINUJÍN / RIPLEY CENTER, SI; NMAJH

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THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES
MOMENTOUS OR MERELY MEMORABLE

BY ALISON McLEAN

175 YEARS AGO
CITY CONFLAGRATION

A blaze in a New York City warehouse quickly grows into the Great Fire of New York, December 16, 1835. Volunteer firemen battle winter winds that spread flames and freeze water in hydrants and hoses. In 15 hours the fire destroys 674 buildings, devastating the financial center of New York and the nation. With a revamped fire department and a new water system, the city rises again.

120 YEARS AGO MELEE MASSACRE

As U.S. troops attempt to disarm a band of Hunkpapa and Miniconjou Indians at a camp on South Dakota's Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890, a single rifle shot rings out. In short order the 7th Cavalry—there to arrest Big Foot, a leader of the Ghost Dance movement feared by whites to be inciting rebellion—opens fire on the camp with rifles and Hotchkiss guns. More than 150 Indian men, women and children and 25 Army soldiers are killed in the last major confrontation between Indians and soldiers in the West.

150 YEARS AGO EXPECTATIONS FULFILLED

Charles Dickens publishes the first installment of *Great Expectations* in his weekly magazine *All the Year Round*, December 1, 1860. Building the novel of class and ambition on a "fine new and grotesque idea"—the unexpected tie between Pip, the orphan narrator, and the convict Magwitch—he adds such indelible characters as the unrelentingly bridal Miss Havisham. A popular success, the autobiographical novel—now considered among Dickens' best—saves the financially troubled magazine, and when published as a book in 1861, sells out three editions in a month.

150 YEARS AGO RESOLVED: DISSOLVED

South Carolina votes to secede from the Union, December 20, 1860. Citing the Northern states' refusal to enforce federal fugitive slave laws, and the election to the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, who opposes the spread of slavery, the state declares "All hope of remedy is rendered vain." The first of 11 states to secede, South Carolina sees the Civil War's first action, the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, in April 1861.

20 YEARS AGO DREAM WEAVER

On Christmas Day 1990, British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee, 35, demonstrates the workings of his new creation, the World Wide Web, over the Internet. Programmed to link information on any computer to information on any other, and allow it to be shared, the Web turns the Internet from a largely academic tool into a global fabric for communication and commerce with more than 200 million Web sites in 2010.

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The only great ape unique to Asia, orangutans (a male named Doyok in a reserve) are increasingly rare, with fewer than 50,000 in Borneo.

MISSION ORANGUTAN

After devoting her life to saving the primates in the wilds of Borneo, the anthropologist Biruté Mary Galdikas faces her biggest challenge yet

BY BILL BRUBAKER PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANUP SHAH AND FIONA ROGERS

Darkness is fast approaching

at Camp Leakey, the outpost in a Borneo forest that Biruté Mary Galdikas created almost 40 years ago to study orangutans. The scientist stands on the porch of her weathered bungalow and announces, "It's party time!"

There will be no gin and tonics at this happy hour in the wilds of Indonesia's Central Kalimantan province. Mugs of lukewarm coffee will have to do. Yes, there's food. But the cardboard boxes of mangoes, guavas and durians—a fleshy tropical fruit with a famously foul smell—are not for us humans.

"Oh, there's Kusasi!" Galdikas says, greeting a large orangutan with soulful brown eyes as he emerges from the luxuriant rain forest surrounding the camp. Kusasi stomps onto the porch, reaches into a box of mangoes and carries away three in each powerful hand. Kusasi was Camp Leakey's dominant male until a rival named Tom took charge several years ago. But Kusasi, who weighs in at 300 pounds, can still turn aggressive when he needs to.

"And Princess!" Galdikas says, as another "orang"—noticeably smaller than Kusasi but every bit as imposing, especially to a newcomer like me—steps out of the bush. "Now Princess is really smart," she says. "It takes Princess a while, but if you give her the key she can actually unlock the door to my house."

"And Sampson! And Thomas!" Galdikas smiles as these juvenile males bare their teeth and roll around in the dirt, fighting. They *are* fighting, right? "Noooo, they're just playing," Galdikas tells me. "They are just duplicating how adult males fight. Sampson makes wonderful play faces, doesn't he?"

No Camp Leakey party would be complete without Tom, the reigning alpha male and Thomas' older brother. Tom helps himself to an entire box of mangoes, reminding Kusasi who's boss. Tom bit Kusasi severely and took control, Galdikas tells me, nodding toward Tom and whispering as if Kusasi might be listening. "Be careful," she says as the new monarch brushes past me on the porch. "He's in a bad mood!"

And then, just as suddenly as they appeared, Tom, Kusasi and the gang leave this riverside camp to resume their mostly solitary lives. Galdikas' mood darkens with the sky. "They don't say goodbye. They just melt away," she says, her eyes a bit moist. "They just fade away like old soldiers."

GALDIKAS, 64, HAS BEEN living among orangutans since 1971, conducting what has become the world's longest continuous study by one person of a wild mammal. She has done more than anyone to protect orangutans and to help the outside world understand them.

Her most chilling fear is that these exotic creatures with long arms, reddish brown hair and DNA that is 97 percent the same as ours will fade into oblivion. "Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I just clutch my head because the situation is so catastrophic," Galdikas says in a quiet, urgent voice. "I mean, we're right at the *edge* of extinction."

Galdikas has been sounding the "e" word for decades while battling loggers, poachers, gold miners and other intruders into the orangutans' habitat. And now a new foe is posing the most serious threat yet to Asia's great orange apes. Corporations and plantations are rapidly destroying rain forests to plant oil palms, which produce a highly lucrative crop. "Words cannot describe what palm oil companies have done to drive orangutans and other wildlife to near-extinction," Galdikas says. "It's simply *horrific*."

According to the Nature Conservancy, forest loss in Indonesia has contributed to the death of some 3,000 orangutans a year over the past three decades. All told, the world's fourth most populous nation is losing about 4.6 million acres of forest every year, an area almost as large as New Jersey. A 2007 United Nations Environment Programme report, "The Last Stand of the Orangutan: State of Emergency," concluded that palm oil plantations are the primary cause of rain forest loss in Indonesia and Malaysia—the largest producers of palm oil and the only countries in the world where wild orangutans can still be found. Between 1967 and 2000, Indonesia's palm oil plantation acreage increased tenfold as world demand for this commodity soared; it has almost doubled in this decade.

With 18 million acres under cultivation in Indonesia and about as much in Malaysia, palm oil has become the world's number one vegetable oil. The easy-to-grow ingredient is found in shampoos, toothpaste, cosmetics, margarine, chocolate bars and all manner of snacks and processed foods. Global sales are expected only to increase as demand for biofuels, which can be manufactured with palm oil, soars in the coming years.

Palm oil companies don't see themselves as the bad guys, of course. Singapore-based Wilmar International Ltd., one of the world's largest producers, says it is "committed to ensuring the conservation of rare, threatened and endangered species." The companies point out that they provide employment for millions of people in the developing world (the oil palm tree is also grown in Africa and South

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BILL BRUBAKER *wrote about Haitian art after the earthquake for the September issue of* SMITHSONIAN. **ANUP SHAH** *and* **FIONA ROGERS'** *photographs of gelada primates ran last year.*

ALL PHOTOS BY ANUP SHAH & FIONA ROGERS / WWW.SHAHROGERSPHOTOGRAPHY.COM; MAP: GUILBERT GATES

PLEASE DO NOT
•Feed the Orangutans,
•Eat in front of the Orangutans, or
•Touch the Orangutans and
Please take your litter away with you
THANK YOU

The world's leading orangutan expert, Galdikas has also rescued injured or orphaned orangutans and returned more than 400 to the wild (left: feeding fruit to young, recently released orangutans). Camp Leakey (below left), her research headquarters, "is my favorite place on the planet," she says, "because you can interact with great apes as equals."

MICHAEL P. TURCO; PAULA BRONSTEIN / GETTY IMAGES

America), while producing a shelf-stable cooking oil free of trans fats. As fuel, palm oil does not contribute as much greenhouse gas to the atmosphere as fossil fuels, although there is a furious debate over whether the carbon dioxide absorbed by the palm trees makes up for the greenhouse gases dispersed into the atmosphere when rain forests are burned and plowed to create plantations.

Nowhere is the clash between planters and conservationists more important than in Borneo, an island divided into Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. Its rain forests are among the most ecologically diverse in the world, with about 15,000 types of plants, more than 600 species of birds and an animal population that also includes the clouded leopard and pygmy elephant. "Camp Leakey still looks like a primeval Eden," Galdikas says. "It's magical." Her camp is in Tanjung Puting National Park, a one-million-acre reserve managed by the Indonesian government with help from her Orangutan Foundation International (OFI). But the habitat is not fully protected. "If you go eight kilometers north [of the camp], you come into massive palm oil plantations," she says. "They go on forever, hundreds of kilometers."

So far, in a bid to outmaneuver oil palm growers, Galdikas' OFI has purchased several hundred acres of peat swamp forest and partnered with a Dayak village to manage 1,000 more. And during my five days in Kalimantan, she promises to show me the fruits of her work not only as a scientist and conservationist but as a swampland investor as well. Having grown up in Miami, I can't help but think of the old line, "If you believe *that*, I've got some swampland in Florida to sell you," implying the stuff is utterly worthless. In Borneo, I learn, swampland is coveted.

BIRUTÉ MARY GALDIKAS WASN'T LOOKING to become a real estate magnate when she arrived on the island four decades ago to study orangutans. She had earned a master's degree in anthropology at UCLA (a PhD would follow). Her research in Borneo was encouraged by legendary paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey, whose excavations with his wife, Mary, in East Africa unearthed some of the most important fossils and stone tools of our hominid ancestors. (Leakey also mentored chimp researcher Jane Goodall and gorilla researcher Dian Fossey; he called them the "trimates.")

GREAT APE THINK TANK

What makes human and orangutan brains different? Watch researchers grapple with the question, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/orangutans

The Borneo that greeted Galdikas and her then-husband, photographer Rod Brindamour, was one of the most isolated and mysterious places on earth, an island where headhunting was part of the collective memory of local tribes.

To locals, Galdikas was very much an oddity herself. "I started crying the first time I saw Biruté because she looked so strange. She was the first Westerner I'd ever seen!" says Cecep, Camp Leakey's information officer, who was a boy of 3 when he first glimpsed Galdikas 32 years ago. Cecep, who, like many Indonesians, goes by a single name, says he stopped crying only after his mother assured him she was not a hunter: "She's come here to help us."

The daughter of Lithuanians who met as refugees in Ger-

many and immigrated first to Canada, then the United States, Galdikas has paid dearly for the life she has chosen. She has endured death threats, near-fatal illnesses and bone-chilling encounters with wild animals. She and Brindamour separated in 1979, and their son, Binti, joined his father in Canada when he was 3 years old. Both parents had worried that Binti was not being properly socialized in Borneo because his best friends were, well, orangutans. Galdikas married a Dayak chief named Pak Bohap and they had two children, Jane and Fred, who spent little time in Indonesia once they were teenagers. "So this hasn't been easy," she says.

Still, she doesn't seem to have many regrets. "To me, a lot of my experiences with orangutans have the overtones of epiphanies, almost religious experiences," she says with a far-off gaze. "Certainly when you are in the forest by yourself it's like being in a parallel universe that most people don't experience."

Orangutans live wild only on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. The two populations have been isolated for more than a million years and are considered separate species; the Bornean orangutans are slightly larger than the Sumatran variety. Precious little was known about orangutan biology before Galdikas started studying it. She has discovered that the tree-dwelling animals spend as much as half the day on the ground. Adult males can reach five feet tall (though they rarely stand erect) and weigh up to 300 pounds. "They're massive," says Galdikas. "That's what you notice more than height." Females weigh about half as much and are four feet tall. Both sexes can live 30 to 50 years. At night they sleep in nests of sticks they build high in the treetops.

Galdikas also has documented that the orangs of Tanjung Puting National Park procreate about once every eight years, the longest birth interval of any wild mammal. "One of

the reasons orangutans are so vulnerable is because they are not rabbits that can have a few litters every year," she says. After an eight-month pregnancy, females bear a single infant, which will remain with its mother for eight or nine years.

Galdikas has cataloged about 400 types of fruit, flowers, bark, leaves and insects that wild orangutans eat. They even like termites. Males usually search for food alone, while females bring along one or two of their offspring. Orangs have a keen sense of where the good stuff can be found. "I was in the forest once, following a wild orangutan female, and I knew we were about two kilometers from a durian tree that was fruiting," Galdikas says on the front porch of her bungalow at Camp Leakey. "Right there, I was able to predict that she was heading for that tree. And she traveled in a straight line, not meandering at all until she reached the tree."

Males are frighteningly unpredictable. Galdikas recalls one who picked up her front porch bench and hurled it like a missile. "It's not that they're malicious," Galdikas assures me, gesturing toward the old bench. "It's just that their testosterone surge will explode and they can be very dangerous, inadvertently." She adds, perhaps as a warning that I shouldn't get too chummy with Tom and Kusasi, "if that bench had hit somebody on the head, that person would have been maimed for life."

She also has made discoveries about how males communicate with one another. While it was known that they use their throat pouches to make bellowing "long calls," signaling their presence to females and asserting their dominance (real or imagined) to other males, she discerned a call reserved especially for fellow males; roughly translated, this "fast call" says: I know you're out there and I'm ready to fight you.

Along the way, Galdikas has published her findings in four books and dozens of other publications, both scientific and general interest; signed on as a professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia (she spends about half the year in Canada and the United States); and mentored hundreds of aspiring scientists, such as the four students from Scotland's University of Aberdeen who are at

JUSTIN GUARIGLIA (2)

The world's largest tree dwellers, orangutans live in swampy forests on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra (top: a young male named Oman in a southern Borneo nature reserve). Their habitat is increasingly taken over by palm oil plantations (above left) that feed the booming global demand for the oil (above right: a refinery in Malaysia), an ingredient in snacks and cosmetics.

Male orangutans tend to be solitary (opposite: Tom at Camp Leakey), while females care for their young for up to nine years (above: Unyuk with 4-year-old daughter Ursula). Orangutan populations are especially vulnerable to environmental threats and poaching in part because the animals reproduce only every eight years or so—less frequently than any other mammal.

Camp Leakey during my visit. Their mission? To collect orangutan feces samples to trace paternity and measure the reproductive success of various males.

I ask Galdikas which orangutan riddles she has yet to solve. "For me," she says, "the big, abiding mystery is: How far did the original males travel here in Tanjung Puting, and where did they come from?" She may never know. The 6,000 remaining orangutans can no longer travel at will because of palm oil plantations surrounding the park, all created since 1971. When she began the study, she says, "orangutans could wander to the other side of Borneo if they felt like it. Now they're trapped. They get lost in these palm oil plantations and they get killed."

Galdikas says the killings are usually carried out by plantation workers who consider the animals pests, by local people who eat their meat and by poachers who slaughter females to capture their babies, which are then sold illegally as pets.

As recently as 1900, more than 300,000 orangutans roamed freely across the jungles of Southeast Asia and southern China. Today an estimated 48,000 orangutans live in Borneo and another 6,500 in Sumatra. Galdikas blames people for their decline: "I mean, orangutans are tough," she says. "They're flexible. They're intelligent. They're adaptable. They can be on the ground. They can be in the canopy. I mean, they are basically big enough to not really have to worry about predators with the possible exception of tigers, maybe snow leopards. So if there were no people around, orangutans would be doing extremely well."

TO GROW OIL PALM (*Elaesis guineensis*) in a peat swamp forest, workers typically drain the land, chop down the trees (which are sold for timber) and burn what's left. It's a procedure, Galdikas says, that not only has killed or displaced thousands of orangutans but also has triggered massive fires and sent huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the air, furthering climate change.

A hopeful sign came in 2007 when Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono partnered with nongovernmental organizations to launch a ten-year plan to protect the remaining orangutans. Without such protections against deforestation and illegal mining and logging, he predicted, "these majestic creatures will likely face extinction by 2050."

"Some of the palm oil plantations seem to be realizing that there is concern in the world about what they are doing," Galdikas says. "This to me is the best development."

But, Galdikas says, provincial officials in Central Kalimantan have done little to stop palm oil plantations from

encroaching on Tanjung Puting. "That's why we're trying to buy as much forest land as we can, so we can actually make sure the palm oil companies can't buy it," she says. "It's absolutely a race against time."

Rain forest is cheap—as little as $200 an acre in recent years if it's far from a town. And Galdikas has a key advantage over the palm oil companies: she is trusted by the Dayak community. "People here respect Dr. Biruté as the scientist who devoted her life to fighting to save the orangutans," says Herry Roustaman, a tour guide who heads the local boatmen's association.

Galdikas takes me to see another prized piece of her real estate portfolio, a private zoo just outside Pangkalan Bun that her foundation bought for $30,000. The purchase was a "two-fer," she says, because it enabled her to preserve ten acres of rain forest and shut down a mismanaged zoo that appalled her. "I bought the zoo so I could release all the animals," she says. "There were no orangutans in this zoo. But there were bearcats, gibbons, a proboscis monkey, even six crocodiles."

A look of disgust creases her face as we inspect a concrete enclosure where a female Malay honey bear named Desi once lived. "Desi was just covered in mange when I first saw her," Galdikas says. "Her paws were all twisted because she tried to escape once and ten men pounced on her and they never treated the paw. They threw food at her and never went in to clean the cage because they were afraid of her. All she had for water was a small cistern with rain water in it, covered with algae. So I said to myself, 'I have to save this bear. This is just inhuman.'"

GALDIKAS' BORNEO OPERATION employs about 200 men and women, including veterinarians, caregivers, security guards, forest rangers, behavioral enrichment specialists (who seek to improve the physical and mental well-being of the captive orangutans), a feeding staff and eight local blind women who take turns holding the orphaned babies 24 hours a day.

"Orangutans like to eat," Galdikas says one morning as she leads two dozen orphaned baby orangutans on a daily romp though the 200-acre care center a few miles outside Pangkalan Bun. "We feed them five times a day at the care center and spend thousands of dollars on mangoes, jackfruits and bananas every month."

About 330 orphaned orangs live at the 13-year-old center, which has its own animal hospital with laboratory, operating room and medical records office. Most are victims of a double whammy; they lost their forest habitat when gold miners, illegal loggers or palm oil companies cleared it. Then their mothers were killed so the babies could be captured and sold as pets. Most came to Galdikas from local authorities. Kiki, a teenager who was paralyzed from the neck down by a disease in 2004, slept on a four-poster bed in an air-conditioned room and was pushed in a pink, blue and orange wheelchair before she died this year.

The juveniles will be released when they are between 8

and 10 years of age, or old enough to avoid being prey for clouded leopards. In addition to the fruits, the youngsters are occasionally given packages of store-bought ramen noodles, which they open with gusto. "If you look closely, you'll see each package has a tiny salt packet attached," says Galdikas. The orangutans carefully open the packets and sprinkle salt on their noodles.

GALDIKAS AND I ROAR DOWN the inky Lamandau River in a rented speedboat, bound for a release camp where she hopes to check up on some of the more than 400 orangutans she has rescued and set free over the years. "The orangutans at the release site we'll be visiting do attack humans," she warns. "In fact, we had an attack against one of our assistants a few days ago. These orangutans are no longer used to human beings."

Galdikas works with communities in Borneo to buy forest land and set it aside for orangutans (above: Thor, a 9-month-old male). To save them, she says, save their habitat: "They're tough. They're flexible. They're intelligent. They're adaptable."

But when we arrive at the camp, about an hour from Pangkalan Bun, we encounter only a feverish, emaciated male sitting listlessly beside a tree. "That's Jidan," Galdikas says. "We released him here a year and a half ago, and he looks terrible."

Galdikas instructs some assistants to take Jidan immediately back to the care center. She sighs. "There's never a dull moment here in Borneo," she says. (Veterinarians later found 16 air rifle pellets under Jidan's skin. The circumstances of the attack have not been determined. After a blood transfusion and rest, Jidan recuperated and was returned to the wild.)

On the dock of the release camp, I ask Galdikas if anyone can save the wild orangutan from extinction.

"Well, I've been here almost 40 years, and the situation is: You keep winning battles, but you keep losing the war," she says. "Will we win? Will we succeed?"

Her questions hang in the vaporous jungle air before she breaks her silence. She suggests that while the orangutans' habitat inside Tanjung Puting will likely survive the next 40 years, the forests outside the park will probably be glutted with oil palm plantations and inhospitable to orangs.

Stepping into the speedboat, Biruté Mary Galdikas says she's determined to protect Tom, Kusasi and future generations of her old soldiers. "Here in Borneo," she says softly, "I take things one day at a time."

SEARCHING FOR BUDDHA

In the remote Afghanistan valley where in 2001 the Taliban destroyed two colossal 1,500-year-old statues, archaeologist Zemaryalai Tarzi is determined to find a reclining third Buddha

BY JOSHUA HAMMER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX MASI

Clad in a safari suit, sun hat, hiking boots and leather gloves, Zemaryalai Tarzi leads the way from his tent to a rectangular pit in the Bamiyan Valley of northern Afghanistan. Crenulated sandstone cliffs, honeycombed with man-made grottoes, loom above us. Two giant cavities about a half-mile apart in the rock face mark the sites where two huge sixth-century statues of the Buddha, destroyed a decade ago by the Taliban, stood for 1,500 years. At the base of the cliff lies the inner sanctum of a site Tarzi calls the Royal Monastery, an elaborate complex erected during the third century that contains corridors, esplanades and chambers where sacred objects were stored.

"We're looking at what used to be a chapel covered with murals," the 71-year-old archaeologist, peering into the pit, tells me. Rulers of the Buddhist kingdom—whose religion had taken root across the region along the Silk Road—made annual pilgrimages here to offer donations to the monks in return for their blessings. Then, in the eighth century, Islam came to the valley, and Buddhism began to wane. "In the third quarter of the ninth century, a Muslim conqueror destroyed everything—including the monastery," Tarzi says. "He gave Bamiyan the *coup de grâce*, but he couldn't destroy the giant Buddhas." Tarzi gazes toward the two empty niches, the one to the east 144 feet high and the one to the west 213 feet high. "It took the Taliban to do that."

The Buddhas of Bamiyan, carved out of the cliff's malleable rock, long presided over this peaceful valley, protected by its near impregnable position between the Hindu Kush mountains to the north and the Koh-i-Baba range to the south. The monumental figures survived the coming of Islam, the scourge of Muslim conqueror Yaqub ibn Layth Saffari, the invasion and annihilation of virtually the entire Bamiyan population by Mongol warriors led by Genghis Khan in A.D. 1221 and the British-Afghan wars of the 19th century. But they couldn't survive the development of modern weaponry or a fanatical brand of Islam that gained ascendancy in Afghanistan following the war between the Soviet Union and the mujahedeen in the 1980s: almost ten years ago, in March 2001, after being denounced by Taliban fanatics as "false idols," the statues were pulverized with high explosives and rocket fire. It was an act that generated worldwide outrage and endures as a symbol of mindless desecration and religious extremism.

From almost the first moment the Taliban were driven from power at the end of 2001, art historians, conservationists and others have dreamed of restoring the Buddhas. Tarzi, however, has another idea. Somewhere in the shadow of the niches, he believes, lies a third Buddha—a 1,000-foot-long reclining colossus built at roughly the same time as the standing giants. His belief is based on a description written 1,400 years ago by a Chinese monk, Xuanzang, who visited the kingdom for several weeks. Tarzi has spent seven years probing the ground beneath the niches in search of the fabled statue. He has uncovered seven monasteries, fragments of a 62-foot-long reclining Buddha and many pieces of pottery and other Buddhist relics.

But other scholars say the Chinese monk may have mistaken a rock formation for the sculpture or was confused about the Buddha's location. Even if the reclining Buddha once existed, some hypothesize that it crumbled into dust centuries ago. "The Nirvana Buddha"—so called because the sleeping Buddha is depicted as he was about to enter the transcendent state of Nirvana—"remains one of archaeology's greatest mysteries," says Kazuya Yamauchi, an archaeologist with the Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation, who has carried out his own search for it. "It is the dream of archaeologists to find it."

Time may be running out. Ever since U.S., coalition and Afghan Northern Alliance forces pushed the Taliban out of Afghanistan, remote Bamiyan—dominated by ethnic Hazaras who defied the Pashtun-dominated Taliban regime and suffered massacres at their hands—has been an oasis of tranquillity. But this past August, insurgents, likely Taliban, ambushed and killed a New Zealand soldier in northern Bamiyan—the first killing of a soldier in the province since the beginning of the war. "If the Taliban grows stronger elsewhere in Afghanistan, they could enter Bamiyan from different directions," says Habiba Sarabi, governor of Bamiyan province and the country's sole female provincial leader. Residents of Bamiyan—as well as archaeologists and conservationists—have lately been voicing the fear that even if new, reconstructed Buddhas rise in the niches, the Taliban would only blow them up again.

TO VISIT TARZI ON HIS ANNUAL seven-week summer dig in Bamiyan, the photographer Alex Masi and I left Kabul at

A cliff-face cavity (opposite) is all that remains of one of two sixth-century Buddha sculptures, sublime expressions of Bamiyan's ancient kingdom. Medieval conquerers couldn't destroy the figures, says archaeologist Tarzi. "It took the Taliban to do that."

dawn in a Land Cruiser for a 140-mile, eight-hour journey on a dirt road on which an improvised explosive device had struck a U.N. convoy only days before. The first three hours, through Pashtun territory, were the riskiest. We drove without stopping, slumped low in our seats, wary of being recognized as foreigners. After snaking through a fertile river valley hemmed in by jagged granite and basalt peaks, we arrived at a suspension bridge marking the start of Hazara territory. "The security situation is now fine," our driver told us. "You can relax."

At the opening of the Bamiyan Valley, we passed a 19th-century mud fort and an asphalt road, part of a $200 million network under construction by the U.S. government and the Asian Development Bank. Then the valley widened to reveal a scene of breathtaking beauty: golden fields of wheat, interspersed with green plots of potato and bordered by the snowcapped, 18,000-foot peaks of the Hindu Kush and stark sandstone cliffs to the north. Finally we came over a rise and got our first look at the gaping cavities where the giant Buddhas once stood.

The vista was probably not much different from that which greeted Xuanzang, the monk who had left his home in eastern China in A.D. 629 and followed the Silk Road west across the Taklamakan Desert, arriving in Bamiyan several years later. Xuanzang was welcomed into a prosperous Buddhist enclave that had existed for some 500 years. There, cut from the cliffs, stood the greatest of the kingdom's symbols: a 180-foot-tall western

MAP: GUILBERT GATES

Tarzi (above: in Bamiyan this past August) hopes to uncover a third Buddha in the valley. He also directs a dig at a third-century Buddhist complex he calls the Royal Monastery (left: workers at the site). The archaeologist was living in exile in France when he learned of the 2001 destruction of the two colossal Buddhas (below left: the intact western-niche figure as it appeared in 1997; right: the empty cavity today). "I watched it on television," he recalls of the demolition by the Taliban, "and I said, 'This is not possible. *Lamentable*.'"

LOWER LEFT: MUZAMMIL PASHA / REUTERS / CORBIS

Buddha and its smaller 125-foot-tall eastern counterpart—both gilded, decorated with lapis lazuli and surrounded by colorful frescoes depicting the heavens. The statues wore masks of wood and clay that in the moonlight conveyed the impression of glowing eyes, perhaps because they were embedded with rubies. Their bodies were draped in stucco tunics of a style worn by soldiers of Alexander the Great, who had passed through the region on his march to the Khyber Pass almost 1,000 years before. "[Their] golden hues sparkle on every side, and [their] precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness," wrote Xuanzang.

A MEMBER OF A BRANCH of Afghanistan's royal family, Tarzi first visited the Buddhas as an archaeology student in 1967. (He would earn a degree from the University of Strasbourg, in France, and become a prominent art historian and archaeologist in Kabul.) During the next decade, he returned to Bamiyan repeatedly to survey restoration work; the masks and some of the stucco garments had eroded away or been looted centuries earlier; the Buddhas were also crumbling.

"I visited every square inch of Bamiyan," he told me. It was during this time, he said, that he became convinced, based on Xuanzang's description, of the existence of a third Buddha. The monk mentioned a second monastery, in addition to the Royal Monastery, which is near the western Buddha. Inside it, he wrote, "there is a figure of Buddha lying in a sleeping position, as when he attained Nirvana. The figure is in length about 1,000 feet or so."

In 1978, a coup led by radical Marxists assassinated Afghanistan's first president; Tarzi's search for the sleeping Buddha was put on hold. Believing his life was in danger, Tarzi fled the country. "I left for Paris and became a refugee," he

told me. He worked as a waiter in a restaurant in Strasbourg, married twice and had three children—daughters Nadia and Carole, and son David. Tarzi began teaching archaeology and became a full professor at the University of Strasbourg.

Back in Bamiyan, trouble was brewing. After several failed attempts to conquer the province, Taliban forces cut deals with Tajik and Hazara military leaders and marched in unopposed in September 1998. Many Hazara fled just ahead of the occupation. My interpreter, Ali Raza, a 26-year-old Hazara who grew up in the shadow of the eastern Buddha and played among the giant statues as a child, remembers his father calling the family together one afternoon. "He said, 'You must collect your clothes; we have to move as soon as possible, because the Taliban have arrived. If they don't kill us, we will be lucky.'" They gathered their mules and set out on foot, hiking south over snowy mountain passes to neighboring Maidan Wardak province; Raza later fled to Iran. The family didn't return home for five years.

In February 2001, Al Qaeda-supporting Taliban radicals, having won a power struggle with moderates, condemned the Buddhas as "idolatrous" and "un-Islamic" and announced their intention to destroy them. Last-ditch pleas by world leaders to Mullah Omar, the Taliban's reclusive, one-eyed leader, failed. During the next month, the Taliban—with the help of Arab munitions experts—used artillery shells and high explosives to destroy both figures. A Hazara construction worker I'll call Abdul, whom I met outside an unfinished mosque in the hills above Bamiyan, told me that the Taliban had conscripted him and 30 other Hazaras to lay plastic explosives on the ground beneath the larger Buddha's feet. It took three weeks to bring down the statue, Abdul told me. Then "the Taliban celebrated by slaughtering nine cows." Koichiro Matsuura, the head of UNESCO, the U.N.'s cultural organization, declared it "abominable to witness the cold and calculated destruction of cultural properties which

JOSHUA HAMMER *reports from his base in Berlin. Photographer* **ALEX MASI** *travels the world on assignment from London.*

Bamiyan's cliffs contain artifacts as well as vestiges of Buddhist art (clockwise from opposite top: decorative grotto paintings; scaffolding shores up the cavity where the eastern Buddha stood; a Japanese preservationist stabilizes a cave wall; remains of the western-niche Buddha's feet). In the niches, says a conservationist, "You can see traces of the fingers of Buddhist workers, from 1,500 years ago."

were the heritage of . . . the whole of humanity." U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell deemed it a "tragedy."

Tarzi was in Strasbourg when he heard the news. "I watched it on television, and I said, 'This is not possible. *Lamentable*,'" he said.

Over lunch in the house he rents each summer in Bamiyan, he recounted the campaign he waged to return to Afghanistan after U.S. Special Forces and the Northern Alliance drove Osama bin Laden's protectors from power. In 2002, with the help of acquaintances such as the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, Tarzi persuaded the French government to give him funding (it has ranged from the equivalent of $40,000 to $50,000 a year) to search for the third Buddha. He flew to Bamiyan in July of that year and announced to a fiercely territorial warlord who had taken charge of the area that he planned to begin excavations. Tarzi was ordered to leave at once. "There was no real government in place, and I had nothing in writing. [Afghan] President [Hamid] Karzai wasn't aware of the mission. So I went back to France." The following year, Tarzi returned to Kabul, where Karzai received him warmly and gave a personal guarantee of safe passage.

ONE MORNING, I JOINED TARZI in a tent beside the excavation site; we walked along a gully where some digging was going on. During his first excavation, in 2003, he told me with a touch of bravado, "The valley was filled with mines, but I wasn't afraid. I said, 'Follow me, and if I explode, you can take a different route.' And I took out a lot of mines myself, before the de-mining teams came here." Tarzi stopped before a second excavation pit and called to one of his diggers, a thin, bearded Hazara man who walked with a slight limp. The man, Tarzi told me, had lost both legs to a mine five years ago. "He was blown up just above where we're standing now, next to the giant Buddha," he added, as I shifted nervously. "We fitted him with prostheses, and he went back to work."

The archaeologist and I climbed into a minibus and drove to a second excavation site, just below the eastern niche where the smaller Buddha stood. He halted before the ruins of a seventh-century stupa, or relic chamber, a heap of clay and conglomerate rock. "This is where we started digging back in 2003, because the stupa was already exposed," Tarzi said. "It corresponded with Xuanzang's description, 'east of the Royal Monastery.' I thought at the beginning that the Buddha would be lying here, underneath the wheat fields. So I dug here, and I found a lot of ceramics, sculptures, but no Buddha."

JOURNEY TO BAMIYAN

Photographer Alex Masi spent nearly a week exploring the ancient ruins in Bamiyan. See more of what he found, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/bamiyan

Tarzi now gazed at the stupa with dismay. The 1,400-year-old ruin was covered with socks, shirts, pants and underwear, laundry laid out to dry by families living in nearby grottoes. "Please take a picture of the laundry drying on top of my stupa," he told one of the five University of Strasbourg graduate students who had joined him for the summer. Tarzi turned toward the cliff face, scanning the rough ground at its base. "If the great Buddha exists," he said, "it's there, at the foot of the great cliffs."

Not everyone is convinced. To be sure, Xuanzang's account is widely accepted. "He was remarkably accurate," says Nancy Dupree, an American expert on Afghan art and culture who has lived in Kabul for five decades. "The fact that he mentioned it means that there must have been something there." Kosaku Maeda, a retired professor of archaeol-

ogy in Tokyo and one of the world's leading experts on the Bamiyan Valley, agrees that the monk probably did see a Sleeping Buddha. But Maeda believes that the figure, which was likely made of clay, would have crumbled into dust centuries ago. "If you think of a 1,000-foot-long reclining Buddha, then it would require 100 to 130 feet in height," he said. "You should see such a hill. But there is nothing." Kazuya Yamauchi, the Japanese archaeologist, believes Xuanzang's description of the figure's location is ambiguous. He contends it lies in a different part of the valley, Shari-i-Gholghola, or the "City of Screams," where the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan massacred thousands of inhabitants.

A SHORT WHILE AFTER MY OUTING with Tarzi, I climbed up some rickety metal scaffolding inside the eastern niche with Bert Praxenthaler, a Munich-based art historian and sculptor from the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a nongovernmental organization that receives UNESCO funding to shore up the niche walls, which were badly damaged by the Taliban blasts. In one of his first visits here some years ago, Praxenthaler recalls, he was rappelling inside the niche when he realized it was about to cave in. "It is just mud and pebbles baked together over millions of years," he said. "It lacks a natural cement, so the stone is rather weak. One slight earthquake would have destroyed everything." Praxenthaler and his team pumped 20 tons of mortar into cracks and fissures in the niche, then drilled dozens of long steel rods into the walls to support it."They are now stable," he said. Pointing to some faint smudges on the rough wall, he added: "You can see traces of the fingers of Buddhist workers, from 1,500 years ago." Praxenthaler's work led him to some serendipitous discov-

Although the valley has been stable since the Taliban were ousted in 2001 (above: local families collect water), the future is uncertain. "If the Taliban grows stronger . . . they could enter Bamiyan," says provincial governor Habiba Sarabi.

eries, including a tiny fabric bag—"closed with rope and sealed with two stamps"—concealed in a crevice behind the giant Buddha at the time it was constructed. "We still haven't opened it yet," he told me. "We think there is a Buddhist relic inside." (Praxenthaler is organizing a research project that will examine the presumably fragile contents.)

Preservation of the niches—work on the western one is scheduled to begin soon—is the first step, Praxenthaler said, in what many hope will be the reconstitution of the destroyed statues. During the past decade, conservationists, artists and others have floated many proposals, ranging from constructing concrete replicas to leaving the niches empty. Hiro Yamagata, a Japanese artist based in California, suggested that laser images of the Buddhas be projected onto the cliff face—an idea later abandoned as too costly and impractical.

For his part, Praxenthaler supports a method known as anastylosis, which involves combining surviving pieces of the Buddhas with modern materials. "It would be a fragmented Buddha, with gaps and holes, and later, they could fill in the gaps in a suitable way," he said. This approach has gathered strong backing from Governor Sarabi, as well as from archaeologists and art conservators, but it may not be feasible: most of the original Buddhas were pulverized, leaving only a few recognizable fragments. In addition, few Afghan officials think it politically wise, given the Islamic fervor and xenophobic sentiment of much of the country, especially among the Pashtun, to embrace a project celebrating the country's Buddhist past. "Conservation is OK, but at the moment they are critical about what smells like rebuilding the Buddha," Praxenthaler said. Others, including Tarzi, believe the niches should remain empty. New Buddhas, says Nancy Dupree, would turn Bamiyan into "an amusement park, and it would be a desecration to the artists who created the originals. The empty niches have a poignancy all their own." Tarzi agrees. "Leave the two Buddha niches as two pages of history," he told me, "so that future generations will know that at a certain moment, folly triumphed over reason in Afghanistan."

THE FUNDING THAT TARZI currently gets from the French government allows him and his graduate students to fly from Strasbourg to Bamiyan each July, pay the rent on his house and employ guards and a digging team. He says he has been under no pressure to hasten his search, but the longer the work continues, the greater the likelihood his benefactors will run out of patience. "I've discovered sculptures, I've discovered the stupa, I've discovered the monasteries, I've developed a panorama of Bamiyan civilization from the first century to the arrival of Genghis Khan," he says. "The scientific results have been good."

Tarzi also continues to enjoy support from Afghan officials and many of his peers. "Tarzi is a well-educated, experienced Afghan archaeologist, and we need as many of those as we can get," says Brendan Cassar, the Kabul-based cultural specialist for UNESCO, which declared Bamiyan a World Heritage site in 2003. Nancy Dupree told me that Tarzi "wants to return something to Afghans to bolster their confidence and their belief [in the power of] their heritage. It's more than archaeology for him." But his ultimate goal, she fears, may never be realized. "What he has done is not to be sniffed at, he's found things there, but whether he will find the reclining Buddha, I really doubt."

After seven years of searching, even Tarzi has begun to hedge his bets. "I still have hope," he told me as we walked through irrigated fields of potatoes at the edge of his eastern excavations. "But I'm getting older—and weaker. Another three years, then I'll be finished."

IN A PINE FOREST IN RURAL NORTH-eastern China, a rugged shale slope is packed with the remains of extinct creatures from 125 million years ago, when this part of Liaoning province was covered with freshwater lakes. Volcanic eruptions regularly convulsed the area at the time, entombing untold millions of reptiles, fish, snails and insects in ash. I step gingerly among the myriad fossils, pick up a shale slab not much larger than my hand and smack its edge with a rock hammer. A seam splits a russet-colored fish in half, producing mirror impressions of delicate fins and bones as thin as human hairs.

One of China's star paleontologists, Zhou Zhonghe, smiles. "Amazing place, isn't it?" he says.

It was in 1995 that Zhou and colleagues announced the discovery of a fossil from this prehistoric disaster zone that heralded a new age of paleontology. The fossil was a primitive bird the size of a crow that may have been asphyxiated by volcanic fumes as it wheeled above the lakes all those millions of years ago. They named the new species *Confuciusornis*, after the Chinese philosopher.

Until then, only a handful of prehistoric bird fossils had been unearthed anywhere in the world. That's partly because birds, then as now, were far less common than fish and invertebrates, and partly because birds more readily evaded mudslides, tar pits, volcanic eruptions and other geological phenomena that captured animals and preserved traces of them for the ages. Scientists have located only ten intact fossilized skeletons of the earliest known bird, *Archaeopteryx*, which lived at the end of the Jurassic period, about 145 million years ago.

Zhou, who works at the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, believed that the extraordinary bone beds in Liaoning might fill in some of the many blanks in the fossil record of the earliest birds. He couldn't have been more prophetic. In the past 15 years, thousands of exquisitely preserved fossil birds have emerged from the ancient lakebed, called the Yixian Formation. The region has also yielded stunning dinosaur specimens, the likes of which had never been seen before. As a result, China has been the key to solving one of the biggest questions in dinosaur science in the past 150 years: the real relationship between birds and dinosaurs.

DINOSAURS' LIVING DESCENDANTS

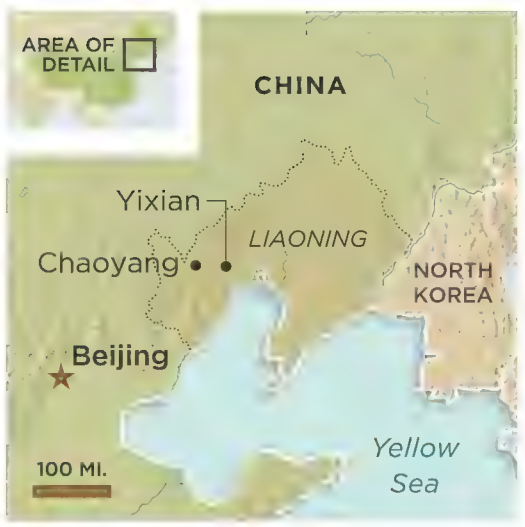
China's spectacular feathered fossils have finally answered the century-old question about the ancestors of today's birds

BY RICHARD STONE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFEN CHOW

Discoverer of more dinosaur species than any other living scientist, Xu Xing (in his Beijing lab with a cast of parrot-faced *Psittacosaurus*) says some dinosaurs have birdlike traits, including feathers.

The idea that birds—the most diverse group of land vertebrates, with nearly 10,000 living species—descended directly from dinosaurs isn't new. It was raised by the English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley in his 1870 treatise, *Further Evidence of the Affinity between the Dinosaurian Reptiles and Birds*. Huxley, a renowned anatomist perhaps best remembered for his ardent defense of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, saw little difference between the bone structure of *Compsognathus*, a dinosaur no bigger than a turkey, and *Archaeopteryx*, which was discovered in Germany and described in 1861. When Huxley looked at ostriches and other modern birds, he saw smallish dinosaurs. If a baby chicken's leg bones were enlarged and fossilized, he noted, "there would be nothing in their characters to prevent us from referring them to the *Dinosauria*."



Still, over the decades researchers who doubted the dinosaur-bird link also made good anatomical arguments. They said dinosaurs lack a number of features that are distinctly avian, including wishbones, or fused clavicles; bones riddled with air pockets; flexible wrist joints; and three-toed feet. Moreover, the posited link seemed contrary to what everyone thought they knew: that birds are small, intelligent, speedy, warmblooded sprites, whereas dinosaurs—from the Greek for "fearfully great lizard"—were coldblooded, dull, plodding, reptile-like creatures.

In the late 1960s, a fossilized dinosaur skeleton from Montana began to undermine that assumption. *Deinonychus*, or "terrible claw" after the sickle-shaped talon on each hind foot, stood about 11 feet from head to tail and was a lithe predator. Moreover, its bone structure was similar to that of *Archaeopteryx*. Soon scientists were gathering other intriguing physical evidence, finding that fused clavicles were common in dinosaurs after all. *Deinonychus* and *Velociraptor* bones had air pockets and flexible wrist joints. Dinosaur traits were looking more birdlike all the time. "All those things were yanked out of the definition of being a

A key Chinese discovery was a primitive bird called *Confuciusornis*, identified by Zhou Zhonghe (below: with a specimen). The Yixian Formation (opposite top right: the author at a fossil site) also yielded *Sinosauropteryx* (opposite left), the first physical evidence of a feathered dinosaur. Some of its fossils are so well preserved that scientists can see traces of cell structures that contained pigments. The finding led to colorful views of the cat-size animal (opposite bottom right), down to its striped tail.

MAP: GUILBERT GATES; STEFEN CHOW

NANJING INSTITUTE; COURTESY RICHARD STONE; CHUANG ZHAO AND LIDA XING

Textbooks say *Archaeopteryx* (right: a fossil cast), which lived some 150 million years ago, was the first bird (left: an illustration by the ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson). But some paleontologists now say it may have been a feathered non-avian dinosaur.

bird," says paleontologist Matthew Carrano of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

But there was one important feature that had not been found in dinosaurs, and few experts would feel entirely comfortable asserting that chickadees and triceratops were kin until they had evidence for this missing anatomical link: feathers.

A POOR CHINESE FARMER, Li Yingfang, made one of the greatest fossil finds of all time, in August 1996 in Sihetun village, an hour's drive from the site where I'd prospected for fossil fish. "I was digging holes for planting trees," recalls Li, who now has a full-time job at a dinosaur museum built at that very site. From a hole he unearthed a two-foot-long shale slab. An experienced fossil hunter, Li split the slab and beheld a creature unlike any he had seen. The skeleton had a birdlike skull, a long tail and impressions of what appeared to be feather-like structures.

Because of the feathers, Ji Qiang, then the director of the National Geological Museum, which bought one of Li's slabs, assumed it was a new species of primitive bird. But other Chinese paleontologists were convinced it was a dinosaur.

On a visit to Beijing that October, Philip Currie, a paleontologist now at the University of Alberta, saw the specimen and realized it would turn paleontology on its head. The next month, Currie, a longtime China hand, showed a photograph of it to colleagues at the annual meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology. The picture stole the show. "It was such an amazing fossil," recalls paleontologist Hans-Dieter Sues of the National Museum of Natural History. "Sensational." Western paleontologists soon made a pilgrimage to Beijing to see the fossil. "They came back dazed," Sues says.

Despite the feathers, the skeleton left no doubt that the new species, named *Sinosauropteryx*, meaning "Chinese lizard wing," was a dinosaur. It lived around 125 million years ago, based on the dating of radioactive elements in the sediments that encased the fossil. Its integumentary filaments—long, thin structures protruding from its scaly skin—convinced most paleontologists that the animal was the first feathered dinosaur ever unearthed. A dozen dinosaurs with filaments or feathers have since been discovered at that site.

By analyzing specimens from China, paleontologists have filled in gaps in the fossil record and traced the evolutionary relationships among various dinosaurs. The fossils

RICHARD STONE *has written about a Stonehenge burial, a rare antelope and mysterious Tibetan towers for* SMITHSONIAN.

ROGER TORY PETERSON / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK; JIM AMOS / SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY / PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

finally have confirmed, to all but a few skeptics, that birds descended from dinosaurs and are the living representatives of a dinosaur lineage called the Maniraptorans.

Most dinosaurs were not part of the lineage that gave rise to birds; they occupied other branches of the dinosaur family tree. *Sinosauropteryx*, in fact, was what paleontologists call a non-avian dinosaur, even though it had feathers. This insight has prompted paleontologists to revise their view of other non-avian dinosaurs, such as the notorious meat eater *Velociraptor* and even some members of the tyrannosaur group. They, too, were probably adorned with feathers.

THE ABUNDANCE OF FEATHERED FOSSILS has allowed paleontologists to examine a fundamental question: Why did feathers evolve? Today, it's clear that feathers perform many functions: they help birds retain body heat, repel water and attract a mate. And of course they aid flight—but not always, as ostriches and penguins, which have feathers but do not fly, demonstrate. Many feathered dinosaurs did not have wings or were too heavy, relative to the length of their feathered limbs, to fly.

Deciphering how feathers morphed over the ages from spindly fibers to delicate instruments of flight would shed light on the transition of dinosaurs to birds, and how natural selection forged this complex trait. Few scientists know ancient feathers more intimately than IVPP's Xu Xing. He has discovered 40 dinosaur species—more than any other living scientist—from all over China. His office at IVPP, across the street from the Beijing Zoo, is cluttered with fossils and casts.

Xu envisions feather evolution as an incremental process. Feathers in their most primitive form were single filaments, resembling quills, that jutted from reptilian skin. These simple structures go way back; even pterodactyls had filaments of sorts. Xu suggests that feather evolution may have gotten started in a common ancestor of pterodactyls and dinosaurs—nearly 240 million years ago, or some 95 million years before *Archaeopteryx*.

After the emergence of single filaments came multiple filaments joined at the base. Next to appear in the fossil record were paired barbs shooting off a central shaft. Eventually, dense rows of interlocking barbs formed a flat surface: the basic blueprint of the so-called pennaceous feathers of modern birds. All these feather types have been found in fossil impressions of theropods, the dinosaur suborder that includes *Tyrannosaurus rex* as well as birds and other Maniraptorans.

Filaments are found elsewhere in the dinosaur family tree as well, in species far removed from theropods, such as *Psittacosaurus*, a parrot-faced herbivore that arose around 130 million years ago. It had sparse single filaments along its tail. It's

Birds in the Family Tree

Modern birds are direct descendants of Maniraptoran dinosaurs, experts say. The creatures that went extinct millions of years ago are now called "non-avian dinosaurs."

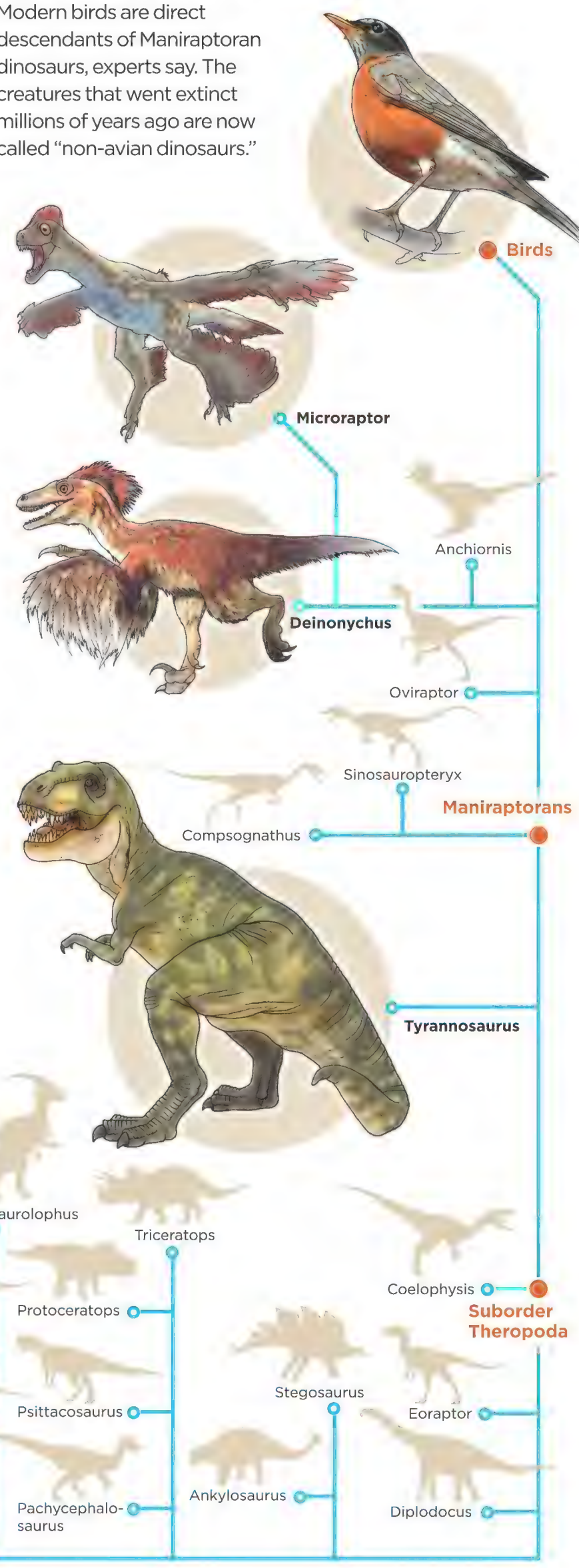


ILLUSTRATION: SAMUEL VELASCO / 5W INFOGRAPHICS

Some dinosaurs engaged in distinctly birdlike behaviors, such as nesting and brooding (above: a partially reconstructed *Oviraptor* fossil from Mongolia with 20 eggs).

not clear why filaments appear in some dinosaur lineages but not in others. "One possibility is that feather-like structures evolved very early in dinosaur history," says Xu, and some groups maintained the structures, while other groups lost them. "But finally in Maniraptorans, feathers stabilized and evolved into modern feathers," he says. Or filaments may have evolved independently at different times. As Sues points out, "It seems that, genetically, it's not a great trick to make a scale into a filament."

Originally, single filaments may well have been for display, the dinosaur equivalent of a peacock's iridescent plumage. Vivid evidence for that theory appeared when scientists unveiled the true colors of 125-million-year-old feathers. Bird feathers and reptile scales contain melanosomes—tiny sacs holding varieties of the pigment melanin. Many paleontologists suspected that dinosaur feathers also contained melanosomes. In Mike Benton's laboratory at the University of Bristol, IVPP's Zhang Fucheng spent more than a year searching for melanosomes in photographs of bird and dinosaur fossils taken with an electron microscope. Zhang's diligence paid off in 2009 when he pinpointed melanosomes in *Confuciusornis* that contained eumelanin, which gives feathers a gray or black tinge, and pheomelanin, which gives them a chestnut to reddish-brown color. The animal's feathers had patches of white, black and orange-brown coloring.

Sinosauropteryx was even more stunning. Zhang found that the filaments running down its back and tail must have made the dinosaur look like an orange-and-white-striped barber pole. Such a vibrant pattern suggests that "feathers first arose as agents for color display," Benton says.

Early feathers could have served other purposes. Hollow filaments may have dissipated heat, much as the frills of some modern lizards do today. Other paleontologists speculate feathers first evolved to *retain* heat. A telling example comes from fossils of *Oviraptor*—a theropod unearthed in Mongolia that lived around 75 million years ago—squatting over egg-filled nests. *Oviraptors* tucked their legs into the center of the clutch and hugged the periphery with their long forelimbs—a posture bearing an uncanny resemblance to brooding birds keeping their eggs warm. Dinosaurs related to *Oviraptor* were covered with pennaceous feathers, suggesting that *Oviraptor* was as well. "Sitting on a nest like that only made sense if it had feathers" to gently insulate its young, says Sues.

Feathers did, of course, eventually become an instrument of flight. Some paleontologists envision a scenario in which dinosaurs used feathers to help them occupy trees for the first time. "Because dinosaurs had hinged ankles, they could not rotate their feet and they couldn't climb well. Maybe feathers helped them scramble up tree trunks," Carrano says. Baby birds of primarily ground-dwelling species like turkeys use their wings in this way. Feathers may have become increasingly aerodynamic over millions of years, eventually allowing dinosaurs to glide from tree to tree. Individuals able to perform such a feat might have been able to reach new food sources or better escape predators—and pass the trait on to subsequent generations.

PURSUING DINOSAURS

Brian Switek keeps up with new discoveries (and cheesy monster movies) in the magazine's Dinosaur Tracking blog. Find it, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/dinosaur

One of the most beguiling specimens to emerge from Liaoning's shale beds is *Microraptor*, which Xu discovered in 2003. The bantamweight beast was a foot or two long and tipped the scales at a mere two pounds. *Microraptor*, from the Dromaeosaur family, was not an ancestor of birds, but it was also unlike any previously discovered feathered dinosaur. Xu calls it a "four-winged" dinosaur because it had long, pennaceous feathers on its arms and legs. Because of its fused breastbone and asymmetrical feathers, says Xu, *Microraptor* surely could glide from tree to tree, and it may even have been better at flying under its own power than *Archaeopteryx* was.

Last year, Xu discovered another species of four-winged dinosaur, also at Liaoning. Besides showing that four-winged flight was not a fluke, the new species, *Anchiornis huxleyi*, named in honor of Thomas Henry Huxley, is the earliest known feathered dinosaur. It came from Jurassic lakebed deposits 155 million to 160 million years old. The find eliminated the final objection to the evolutionary link between birds and dinosaurs. For years, skeptics had raised

GETTY IMAGES

Clockwise starting top left: Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge; Tortuguero Park Canal Cruise; White Faced Monkey; Keel Billed Toucan; Pacific Ocean Beach; Rainforest Hike

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the so-called temporal paradox: there were no feathered dinosaurs older than *Archaeopteryx*, so birds could not have arisen from dinosaurs. Now that argument was blown away: *Anchiornis* is millions of years older than *Archaeopteryx*.

Four-winged dinosaurs were ultimately a dead branch on the tree of life; they disappear from the fossil record around 80 million years ago. Their demise left only one dinosaur lineage capable of flight: birds.

Just when did dinosaurs evolve into birds? Hard to say. "Deep in evolutionary history, it is extremely difficult to draw the line between birds and dinosaurs," says Xu. Aside from minor differences in the shape of neck vertebrae and the relative length of the arms, early birds and their Maniraptoran kin, such as *Velociraptor*, look very much alike.

One of the most unexpected Chinese fossils is *Microraptor*. It had four feathered limbs and almost certainly could fly. But unlike birds, it did not escape extinction.

"If *Archaeopteryx* were discovered today, I don't think you would call it a bird. You would call it a feathered dinosaur," says Carrano. It's still called the first bird, but more for historic reasons than because it is the oldest or best embodiment of birdlike traits.

On the other hand, *Confuciusornis*, which possessed the first beak and earliest pygostyle, or fused tail vertebrae that supported feathers, truly looks like a bird. "It passes the sniff test," Carrano says.

Since the last of the non-avian dinosaurs died out 65 million years ago during the mass extinction that closed the curtain on the Cretaceous period, birds have evolved other characteristics that set them apart from dinosaurs. Modern birds have higher metabolisms than even the most agile *Velociraptor* ever had. Teeth disappeared at some point in birds' evolutionary history. Birds' tails got shorter, their flying skills got better and their brains got bigger than those of dinosaurs. And modern birds, unlike their Maniraptoran ancestors, have a big toe that juts away from the other toes, which allows birds to perch. "You gradually go from the long arms and huge hands of non-avian Maniraptorans to something that looks like the chicken wing you get at KFC," says Sues. Given the extent of these avian adaptations, it's no wonder the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and birds as we know them remained hidden until paleontologists started analyzing the rich fossil record from China.

CHAOYANG IS A DRAB CHINESE CITY with dusty streets; in its darker corners it's reminiscent of gritty 19th-century American coal-mining towns. But to fossil collectors, Chaoyang is a paradise, only a one-hour drive from some of the Yixian Formation's most productive beds.

One street is lined with shops selling *yuhuashi*, or fish fossils. Framed fossils embedded in shale, often in mirror-image pairs, can be had for a dollar or two. A popular item is a mosaic in which a few dozen small slabs form a map of China; fossil fish appear to swim toward the capital, Beijing (and no map is complete without a fish representing Taiwan). Merchants sell fossilized insects, crustaceans and plants. Occasionally, despite laws that forbid trade in fossils of scientific value, less scrupulous dealers have been known to sell dinosaur fossils. The most important specimens, Zhou says, "are not discovered by scientists at the city's fossil shops, but at the homes of the dealers or farmers who dug them."

In addition to *Sinosauropteryx*, several other revelatory specimens came to light through amateurs rather than at scientific excavations. The challenge for Zhou and his colleagues is to find hot specimens before they disappear into private collections. Thus Zhou and his colleague Zhang Jiangyong, a specialist on ancient fish at IVPP, have come to Liaoning province to check out any fossils that dealers friendly to their cause have gotten their hands on of late.

Most of the stock in the fossil shops comes from farmers who hack away at fossil beds when they aren't tending their fields. A tiny well-preserved fish specimen can yield its finder the equivalent of 25 cents, enough for a hot meal. A feathered dinosaur can earn several thousand dollars, a year's income or more. Destructive as it is to the fossil beds, this paleo economy has helped rewrite prehistory.

Zhou picks up a slab and peers at it through his wire-rimmed glasses. "Chairman, come here and look," Zhou says to Zhang (who earned his playful nickname as chairman of IVPP's employees union). Zhang examines the specimen and adds it to a pile that will be hauled back to Beijing for study—and, if they are lucky, reveal another hidden branch of the tree of life.

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The Gift

One Christmastime in the Great Depression, an anonymous Ohio businessman offered to send small sums to needy families. Seventy-five years later, the author discovered just how much his grandfather's generosity had meant

BY TED GUP

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRADLEY E. CLIFT

THE YEAR WAS 1933 AND CHRISTMAS WAS JUST A WEEK AWAY. Deep in the trough of the Great Depression, the people of Canton, Ohio, were down on their luck and hungry. Nearly half the town was out of work. Along the railroad tracks, children in patched coats scavenged for coal spilled from passing trains. The prison and orphanage swelled with the casualties of hard times.

It was then that a mysterious "B. Virdot" took out a tiny ad in the *Canton Repository*, offering to help the needy before Christmas. All he asked was that they write to him and tell him of their hardships. B. Virdot, he said, was not his real name, and no one would ever know his true identity. He pledged that those who wrote to him would also remain anonymous.

Letters poured into the post office by the hundreds. From every corner of the beleaguered town they came—from the baker, the bellhop, the steeplejack, the millworker, the blacksmith, the janitor, the pipe fitter, the salesman, the fallen executive. All of them told their stories in the hope of receiving a hand. And in the days thereafter, $5 checks went out to

In 2008, the author (left: in background) was handed a battered suitcase by his mother; it contained canceled checks and old letters addressed to "B. Virdot" (foreground portrait). Thus began a search for the stories behind the letters.

150 families across the town. Today, $5 doesn't sound like much, but back then it was more like $100. For many, it was more money than they had seen in months. So stunning was the offer that it was featured in a front-page story in the newspaper, and word of it spread a hundred miles.

For many of those who received a check signed by B. Virdot, the Christmas of 1933 would be among their most memorable. And despite endless speculation about his identity, B. Virdot remained unknown, as did the names of those he helped. Years passed. The forges and shops of Canton came back to life, and memories of the Great Depression gradually faded. B. Virdot went to his grave along with many of those he had helped. But his secret was intact. And so it seemed destined to remain.

Then in 2008—75 years later—and 600 miles away, in an attic in Kennebunk, Maine, my 80-year-old mother handed me a battered old suitcase. "Some old papers," she said. At first I didn't know what to make of them—so many handwritten letters, many difficult to read, and all dated December 1933 and addressed to a stranger named B. Virdot. The same name appeared on a stack of 150 canceled checks. It was only after I found the yellowed newspaper article that carried the story of the gift that I came to realize what my mother had given me.

B. Virdot was my grandfather.

His real name was Sam Stone. "B. Virdot" was a combination of his daughters' names—Barbara, Virginia (my mother) and Dorothy. My grandmother had mentioned something about his largesse to my mother when she was a young adult, but it had remained a family secret. Now, 30 years after her father's death, she was comfortable letting the secret out.

Collectively, the letters offer a wrenching vision of the Great Depression and of the struggle within the souls of individuals, many too proud to speak of their anguish even to their loved ones. Some sought B. Virdot's generosity not for themselves, but for their neighbors, friends or relatives. Stirred by their words, I set out to find what became of them, tracking down their descendants, wondering if the $5 gifts had made any difference. From each family, I received permission to use the letter. All of this I did against the backdrop of our own deepening recession, one more devastating than any since the Great Depression itself. I also set out to find why my grandfather made the gifts. I knew his early years had been marked by poverty—as a child he had rolled cigars, worked in a coal mine and washed soda bottles until the acidic cleansing agent ate at his fingertips. (Years later, as the owner of Stone's Clothes, a men's clothier, he finally achieved a measure of success.) But in the course of my research I discovered that his birth cer-

tificate was bogus. Instead of being born in Pittsburgh, as he had long claimed, he was a refugee from Romania who came to this land in his early teens and simply erased his past. Born an orthodox Jew and raised to keep kosher and speak Yiddish, he had chosen to make his gift on a gentile holiday, perhaps as a way of acknowledging his debt to a land that had accepted him.

Among those who wrote to B. Virdot was George Monnot, once one of Canton's most prosperous businessmen. Monnot had co-owned a Ford dealership that sometimes featured an 11-person band in tuxedos. His good fortune had also brought him a lakeside summer home, a yacht and membership in the country club. But by 1931, it was all gone. He and his family were living in an alley apartment among displaced workers, many of them unsure of their next meal. In his letter, he wrote:

George Monnot (in 1929) had been a prosperous car dealer in Canton, Ohio (top: c. 1913).

For 26 years was in the Automobile business prosperous at one time and have done more than my share in giving at Christmas and at all times. Have a family of six and struggle is the word for me now for a living.

Xmas will not mean much to our family this year as my business, bank, real estate, Insurance policies are all swept away.

Our resources are nil at present perhaps my situation is no different than hundreds of others. However a man who knows what it is to be up and down can fully appreciate the spirit of one who has gone through the same ordeal.

You are to be congratulated for your benevolence and kind offer to those who have experienced this trouble and such as the writer is going through.

No doubt you will have a Happy Christmas as there is more real happiness in giving and making someone else happy than receiving. May I extend to you a very Happy Christmas.

Nine days later, Monnot wrote again:

My Dear Mr. B. Virdot,
Permit me to offer my sincere thanks for your kind remembrance for a Happy Christmas.

Indeed this came in very handy and was much appreciated by myself & family.

It was put to good use paying for 2 pairs of shoes for my girls and other little necessities. I hope some day I have the pleasure of knowing to whom we are indebted for this very generous gift.

At present I am not of employment and it is very hard going. However I hope to make some connection soon.

I again thank you on behalf of the family and an earnest wish is that you have a most Happy New Year.

But George Monnot would never again attain economic or social prominence. He spent his final days as a clerk in a factory and his evenings in the basement among his tools, hoping to invent something that might lift him up once more. His tool chest is now in the hands of one of his eight grandsons, Jeffrey Haas, a retired vice president of Procter & Gamble.

IN SOME WAYS, Monnot was one of the lucky ones. He at least had a place to call home. Many of those who reached out to B. Virdot had been reduced to living as nomads. Worse, many parents gave up their children rather than see them starve. A woman named Ida Bailey wrote:

This Xmas is not going to be a Merry one for us, but we are trying to make the best we can of it. We want to do all we can to make the Children happy but can't do much. About 7 years ago Mr. Bailey lost his health and it has been nick & tuck ever since but we thank God he is able to work again. We all work whenever we can make a nickel honest. Three years ago this Depression hit us and we lost all our furniture and had to separate with our Children. We have 4 of them [out of 12] with us again. There are three girls working for their Cloaths & Board. I do wish I could have my children all with me once again. I work by the day any place I can get

MONNOT FAMILY; PP. 66-67; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

work . . . you know the wages they get don't go very far when there is 6 to buy eats for . . . I think if there were some more people in Canton like you and open up their Hearts and share up with us poor people that does their hard work for them for almost nothing (a dollar a day) when the time comes for them to leave this world I would think they would feel better satisfied for they can't take any of it with them. . . .

One of the children the Baileys placed with another family was their son Denzell, who was 14 in 1933. His daughter, Deloris Keogh, told me he had moved more than two dozen times before he reached the sixth grade. He attended nearly every school in Canton at least once. He never had a chance to make friends, he said, or get settled or focus on his studies. He dropped out of the sixth grade and later worked as a bricklayer and janitor. But he vowed that his children would not endure the same rootlessness—that they would know but one home. So with his own hands he began to build a house of stone, gathering blocks from quarries, abandoned barns and a burned-down schoolhouse. Everyone knew of his determination, and friends and neighbors contributed stones to the house. A minister brought back a rock from the Holy Land. Others brought back stones from their vacations. Denzell Bailey found a place for each one. It took him 30 years to complete his house, a monument to his resolve. He died in it on November 23, 1997, at age 78, surrounded by his four children. It was the only home they had known. Denzell's house of stone remains in the Bailey family to this day.

WHEN EDITH MAY WROTE TO B. VIRDOT, she was living on a hardscrabble farm at the edge of town.

"I am writing this because I need clothing, and sometimes we run out of food," explained 14-year-old Helen Palm (in 2010, holding a Depression-era portrait of herself).

Maybe I shouldn't write to you not living right in Canton, but for some time I have been wanting to know somebody who could give me some help.

We have known better days. Four years ago we were getting 135 dollars a month for milk. Now Saturday we got 12. . . . Imagine 5 of us for a month. If I only had five dollars, I would think I am in heaven. I would buy a pair of shoes for my oldest boy in school. His toes are all out & no way to give him a pair.

He was just 6 in October. Then I have a little girl will be 4 two days before Xmas & a boy of 18 months.

I could give them all something for Xmas & I would be very happy. Up to now I haven't a thing for them. I made a dolly for each to look like Santa & that's as much as I could go. Won't you please help me to be happy?

Have you got any ladies in your family could give me some old clothes.

We all took a cold by not having anything warm to wear—it is the children's first cold & my first in ten years. So you can imagine our circumstances.

My husband is a good farmer but we have always rented & that keeps us poor. When we were making good money he bought his machinery & paid for them, so we never wasted anything. He is only 32 & never had anyone to give him a help in starting. . . .

& oh my I know what it is to be hungry & cold. We suffered so last winter & this one is worst.

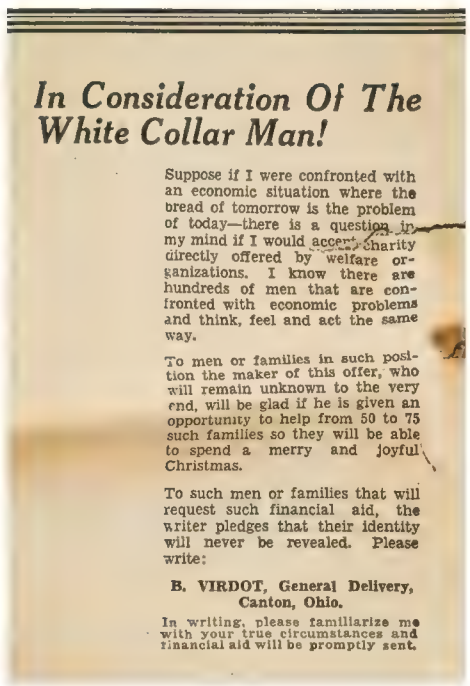
Please do help me! My hus-

CHARITY HITS THE ROAD

Share this story, and learn about the insurance executive who crisscrossed the country on a Harley-Davidson to help people in need, at smith.hy.pr/gifts

HELEN PALM

In a newspaper notice (below) "B. Virdot" said he would "be glad if he is given an opportunity to help from 50 to 75" families "confronted with economic problems." B. Virdot was in fact the author's grandfather, Sam Stone (left: in 1934, with wife Minna and daughters Barbara, Virginia and Dorothy).



In Consideration Of The White Collar Man!

Suppose if I were confronted with an economic situation where the bread of tomorrow is the problem of today—there is a question in my mind if I would accept charity directly offered by welfare organizations. I know there are hundreds of men that are confronted with economic problems and think, feel and act the same way.

To men or families in such position the maker of this offer, who will remain unknown to the very end, will be glad if he is given an opportunity to help from 50 to 75 such families so they will be able to spend a merry and joyful Christmas.

To such men or families that will request such financial aid, the writer pledges that their identity will never be revealed. Please write:

B. VIRDOT, General Delivery, Canton, Ohio.

In writing, please familiarize me with your true circumstances and financial aid will be promptly sent.

band don't know I am writing & I haven't even a stamp, but I am going to beg the mailman to post this for me.

No wonder Edith May complained of the cold: she was Jamaican. She had fallen in love with an African-American man with whom she had been a pen pal. They had gotten married and moved to a farm outside Canton. Edith May's "little girl" was named Felice. Today she well remembers her fourth birthday, two days before Christmas. When the chores were done, she and her family went into town. She remembers the Christmas lights. Her mother took her to a five-and-dime store and told her she could have either a doll or a wooden pony you pulled with a string. She chose the pony. It was the only present she remembers from those hard times, and only during our conversation last year did it occur to her that B. Virdot's check allowed her mother to buy such a gift. Today, Felice May Dunn lives in Carroll County, Ohio, and raises Welsh ponies—a love of hers since childhood.

HELEN PALM WAS ONE OF THE YOUNGEST to appeal to B. Virdot. She wrote in pencil on a slip of paper.

When we went over at the neighbors to borrow the [news]paper I read your article. I am a girl of fourteen. I am writing this because I need clothing. And sometimes we run out of food.

My father does not want to ask for charity. But us children would like to have some clothing for Christmas. When he had a job us children used to have nice things.

I also have brothers and sisters.

If you should send me Ten Dollars I would buy clothing and buy the Christmas dinner and supper.

I thank you.

Finding Helen Palm's descendants was difficult. Her daughter, Janet Rogers, now 72, answered my questions about her mother—when she had been born, when she got married. Just as I was about to ask when her mother had died, Janet asked, "Would you like to speak with my mother?"

It took me a moment to collect myself. I had discovered the last living person to write to B. Virdot.

Even at age 91, Helen Palm, a housewife and great-grandmother, remembers the check she received in 1933. She used the money to buy clothes for her brothers and sisters, just as she had said she would do in her letter, and to take her parents to a nickel show and to buy food. But first, she bought herself a pair of shoes to replace those she had worn through and patched with a cardboard insert cut from a Shredded Wheat box. "I did wonder for a long time who this Mr. B. Virdot was," she told me. Now she is the only one among all those who sought help that Christmas 77 years ago to live long enough to learn his true identity.

"Well," she said to me, "God love him."

TED GUP *is the author of three books, including the new* A Secret Gift, *which documents his grandfather's largesse. Photojournalist* **BRADLEY E. CLIFT** *has worked in 45 states and 44 countries.*

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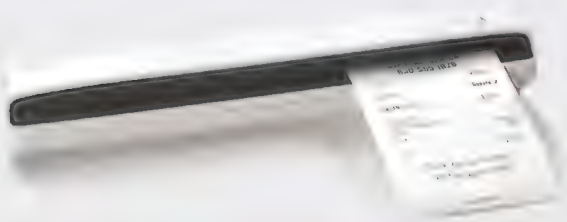

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MARVEL ARCH

A photographer couldn't resist the charms of the astonishing new bridge that bypasses the Hoover Dam

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMEY STILLINGS

TEXT BY T. A. FRAIL

JAMEY STILLINGS HAS BEEN a professional photographer since 1983. His work has taken him across the country and to Nicaragua, India and the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu. In March of 2009, he was between assignments when he decided to take what he calls a "photo road trip" from his home in Santa Fe to the Mojave Desert to scout some solar-power plants there.

He didn't make it to the power plants that day. A sight at the Hoover Dam intervened: two legs of an incomplete arch had been anchored into opposite sides of a canyon about a quarter-mile south of the dam; they were held up by steel cables stretched over towering concrete pillars. Clearly, an epic bridge was underway. "I looked at the bridge and said, "Holy Toledo," recalls Stillings (left). "It played on all the Erector Set fantasies you could imagine. I've had a long-standing interest in the man-al-

The bridge (awaiting decking and with temporary pylons in September 2009) was built to bypass the part of U.S. Route 93 that crosses the Hoover Dam.

tered landscape, in places where man and nature intersect, and this was that on steroids."

It was sunset—the construction lights were coming on. "I just thought, wow, how about spending a day here?" he says. One day turned into more than 30 visits over the next year and a half as the bridge—centerpiece of the Hoover Dam bypass that opened this past October—took shape. Half a dozen times, he chartered a helicopter on his own dime.

HOW TO BUILD A DAM

Completion of the Hoover Dam 75 years ago climaxed a monumental effort. See photographs of how it was done, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/hoover

The dam, dedicated 75 years ago, remains one of the engineering wonders of the world: a concrete wall more than 1,200 feet long and 700 feet high that corked the Colorado River, created the startling blue vastness of Lake Mead and still provides water and electricity to three states. But the bridge is a worthy complement: it carries a four-lane highway almost 900 feet above the river, and it rests on the longest concrete arch in the United States, 1,060 feet. It was built to circumvent the dam-crossing stretch of U.S. Route 93, which was a narrow, tortuous and accident-prone kink in the designated NAFTA

JAMEY STILLINGS *is a photographer based in Santa Fe.*
T.A. FRAIL *is a senior editor at* Smithsonian.

P. 70 MIKE SAKAS (STILLINGS)

highway corridor between Mexico and Canada. Tourists can still drive across the dam, but others will be routed over what has been named the Mike O'Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge, commemorating, respectively, a popular 1970s Nevada governor and the former Arizona Cardinals football player killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan in 2004 while serving in the U.S. Army.

Stillings says he'd like his photographs of the bridge to commemorate the talent and labor of those who built it. But he acknowledges, too, a lingering sadness now that the project is finished. "The evolution of something is more interesting than its completion," he says. "We don't yet understand everything about what it's going to become."

Left (July 2009): The bridge's twin-ribbed arch was built on two legs that grew outward from the Nevada and Arizona sides of Black Canyon until they met in the center. The concrete for each segment of the arch was poured in place over rebar-reinforced forms. Above top (July 2009): Steel cables stretched over the giant pylons provided support until the arch was completed. Above middle (April 2009): Ironworkers hiked out to each day's construction site, making sure to bring their lunches with them. Above bottom (July 2010): Decked with four lanes of highway and a sidewalk, the bridge looms almost 300 feet above the Hoover Dam, offering pedestrians and passengers a new view. Drivers are advised to keep their eyes on the road.

Renowned as an art colony, San Miguel also mounts festivals showcasing indigenous cultures. “Many beautiful towns,” writes American journalist John Davidson, “keep you at bay. San Miguel takes you in, befriends you.”

UNDER THE SPELL *of San Miguel de Allende*

In 1937, a young American named Stirling Dickinson first visited a Mexican town that he would almost single-handedly transform into an international art center BY JONATHAN KANDELL

Photographs by Ann Summa

In 1937, after several months spent traveling through Mexico, a gangly, 27-year-old Chicago native named Stirling Dickinson, who had been somewhat at loose ends since graduating from Princeton, got off a train in San Miguel de Allende, an arid, down-on-its-luck mountain town 166 miles northwest of Mexico City.

Taken from the ramshackle train station by a horse-drawn cart, he was dropped off at the town's leafy main square, El Jardín. It was dawn, and the trees were erupting with the songs of a thousand birds. At the eastern side of the square stood the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel, an outsize, pink-sandstone church with neo-Gothic spires, quite unlike Mexico's traditional domed ecclesiastical buildings. The first rays of the sun glowed over mountain ridges to the east. "There was just enough light for me to see the parish church sticking out of the mist," Dickinson would later recall. "I thought, My God, what a sight! What a place! I said to myself at that moment, I'm going to stay here."

Founded in 1542, the settlement of San Miguel had grown rich from nearby silver mines during centuries of Spanish rule, then fell on hard times as the ore was depleted. By the time Dickinson got there, the War of Independence from Spain (1810-21) and the even bloodier Mexican Revolution (1910-21) had further reduced the town to 7,000 inhabitants—less than a quarter of its population in the mid-1700s. Houses languished in disrepair, with shattered tile roofs and crumbling, faded walls.

Dickinson made his home in a former tannery on San Miguel's higher reaches and soon became a familiar sight, riding around town on a burro. For the next six decades, until his death in 1998, he would lead a renaissance that would transform tiny San Miguel into one of Latin America's most magnetic destinations for artists and expatriates, most of them American, looking for a new venue—or a new life.

"Stirling Dickinson is without doubt the person most responsible for San Miguel de Allende becoming an international art center," says John Virtue, author of *Model American Abroad*, a biography of Dickinson. Although only an amateur painter himself, Dickinson became co-founder and director of the Escuela Universitaria de Bellas Artes, an art institute that he opened in a former convent only a few months after his arrival.

During World War II, Dickinson served with U.S. Naval Intelligence in Washington and the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner of the CIA) in Italy. Returning to San Miguel after the war, he recruited hundreds of young American veterans to study at Bellas Artes on the G.I. Bill of Rights.

In the postwar years, non-artists and retirees, as well as painters and sculptors, were drawn to the city from its neighbor to the north; today, some 8,000 Americans—one out of ten residents—live there. Eighty percent or so are retirees; the others oversee businesses, from cafés and guesthouses to galleries and clothing stores. Most of these expats—some of whom have Mexican spouses—volunteer at more than 100 nonprofit organizations in San Miguel, including the library and health care clinics.

"This *mestizaje*—cultural mixing—has profoundly changed and benefited both sides," says Luis Alberto Villarreal, a former mayor of San Miguel who is currently one of two senators from the state of Guanajuato, in which the town is located. "We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Stirling Dickinson for helping this come about and for raising San Miguel's profile in the world." Walking the cobblestone streets flanked by stucco houses painted vivid shades of ocher, paprika and vermilion, one passes lively squares full

Dickinson (above: in San Miguel, c. 1970; opposite: the same view today) never forgot his first glimpse of the town. "There was just enough light for me to see the parish church sticking out of the mist," he recalled. "I thought. . . . I'm going to stay here."

JOHN VIRTUE COLLECTION; MAP: GUILBERT GATES; P. 74 MICHAEL AMICI

of street musicians and vendors hawking tacos. In the distance rises the Sierra de Guanajuato. In 2008, San Miguel was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site, in large measure because of its intact 17th- and 18th-century center.

While mass murder and kidnapping linked to narcotics gangs have overtaken parts of Mexico, the region around San Miguel has thus far been spared. "The cartels' violence often centers on ports of entry into the U.S. and involves consolidation of contested border areas," says Rusty Payne, spokesman for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. "San Miguel does not fit these criteria."

DOROTHY BIRK—TODAY DOTTY VIDARGAS—was among the first of the young Americans to answer Dickinson's call, in 1947. Six decades later, at age 85, she oversees a real estate agency and furnishings store across from an 18th-century church.

Vidargas grew up in Chicago, a block away from Dickinson. She says he had three passions: art, baseball and orchids. At Bellas Artes, she recalls, he formed a baseball team that won 84 games in a row and captured several regional amateur championships in the 1950s. He traveled throughout Mexico and the world to collect wild orchids, breaking three ribs in a fall during a 1960s expedition to southern Mexico's Chiapas highlands. An orchid he discovered there in 1971 was named after him—*Encyclia dickinsoniana*.

In 1942, in her sophomore year at Wellesley College, Vidargas left academia to enlist in the war effort, eventually serving as a Navy recruiter and, later, as an air controller for the Army Air Forces outside Detroit. After the war, she enrolled at the American Academy, an art institute in Chicago. But in 1947 she decided to spend her G.I. Bill subsidies in San Miguel. "My mother knew Stirling

Harmonious coexistence has long characterized San Miguel's Mexican and American communities (left: the central market, where residents mix with tourists; top right: American restaurateur Donnie Masterton; above: expatriate Dotty Vidargas, in 1948). "This *mestizaje*—cultural mixing—has profoundly changed and benefited both sides," says former mayor Luis Alberto Villarreal.

BOTTOM: DOTTIE VIDARGAS COLLECTION

and figured it would be all right for me to go," she says.

She was one of 55 veterans accepted at Bellas Artes that year. More than 6,000 veterans would apply to the school after the January 1948 issue of *Life* magazine called it a "G.I. Paradise," where "veterans go . . . to study art, live cheaply and have a good time."

But Vidargas' first impression was well this side of paradise. Arriving by train in the pre-dawn darkness, she checked into a hotel where electricity and running water were sporadic. Many of the surrounding buildings were near ruins. Burros outnumbered cars; the stench of manure and raw sewage was overpowering. "I was cold, miserable and ready to board the next train home," she recalls. But she soon found more comfortable student lodging and began her Bellas Artes course work. Between school terms, she traveled with fellow students and Dickinson throughout Mexico.

She even joined the local bullfighting circuit as a *picador*, or horseback-mounted lancer. "It was after a few drinks, on a dare," Vidargas recalls. Soon "*la gringa loca*" ("the crazy Yank"), as she was becoming known, was spending her weekends at dusty bullrings, where her equestrian prowess made her a minor celebrity.

Meanwhile, some members of the town's conservative upper class were outraged by the American students'

carousing. The Rev. José Mercadillo, the parish priest, denounced the hiring of nude models for art classes and warned that the Americans were spreading Protestantism—even godless Communism.

In fact, in 1948, Dickinson recruited the celebrated painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, a Communist Party member, to teach at Bellas Artes. There he lashed out at his critics, far exceeded his modest art-class budget and eventually resigned. Siqueiros left behind an unfinished mural depicting the life of local independence leader Ignacio Allende, whose last name had been appended to San Miguel in 1826 to commemorate his heroism in the war. The mural still graces the premises, which today is occupied by a cultural center.

Apparently convinced that Communists had indeed infested Bellas Artes, Walter Thurston, then the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, blocked the school's efforts to gain the accreditation necessary for its students to qualify for G.I. Bill stipends. Most of the veterans returned home; some were deported. Dickinson himself was expelled from Mexico on August 12, 1950, although he was allowed back a week later. "It was the low point in relations between Americans and the locals," recalls Vidargas. "But my situation was different, because I got married."

José Vidargas, a local businessman, who today is 95, had met his future bride at a bowling alley, one of many postwar fads to invade Mexico from the United States. Some of his relatives wondered about his plans to marry a gringa. "Suddenly, I had to become a very proper Mexican wife to be accepted by the good society families," recalls Dorothy. The couple had five children in seven years, and Dorothy still found time to open the first store in San Miguel to sell pasteurized milk; the real estate agency came later. Today, three sons live in San Miguel; a daughter lives in nearby León; one child died in infancy.

By 1951, the various controversies had closed down Bellas Artes, and Dickinson became director of a new art school, the Instituto Allende, which soon became accredited and began granting Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. Today, the nonprofit school, attended by several hundred students annually, encompasses a fine-arts degree program, a Spanish-language institute and traditional handicraft workshops.

IN 1960, JACK KEROUAC, the novelist who had catapulted to fame three years earlier with the publication of *On the Road*, went to San Miguel with pals Allen Ginsburg and Neal Cassady. Ginsburg read his poetry at the Instituto Allende, while Kerouac and Cassady spent most of their time downing tequilas at La Cucaracha, a traditional Mexican cantina that re-

BOTTOM: TIME LIFE PICTURES / PIX INC. / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

The most significant artist associated with San Miguel was painter David Alfaro Siqueiros (inset), whose unfinished 1948 mural (far left) embellishes the Bellas Artes school; he initially vowed that "All will be painted, including the floor." Today, an inspired aesthetic is everywhere visible, from artisan studios to boutique hotels (middle: ironsmith Tomas Damian; right: the interior of the Hotel Oasis). "I envisioned a place where visitors could get away from the bustling outside," says Oasis owner Nancy Hooper.

mains popular to this day. The trio remained only a few days, but in 1968, Cassady returned to San Miguel, where he died at age 41 from the effects of alcohol, drugs and exposure.

THE PLAINTIVE RECORDINGS OF PEDRO INFANTE, still Mexico's most popular country singer more than a half century after his death, can be heard most mornings at San Miguel's largest traditional food market, the Mercado Ignacio Ramírez. Vendors display varieties of chile, red and green prickly pears, black and green avocados, orange and yellow melons, tropical fruits including mamey, with its pumpkin-hued flesh, and guayaba, whose texture resembles a white peach. Nopales (cactus leaves shorn of spines) are stacked alongside Mexican herbs, including epazote, used to flavor black beans, and dark red achiote seeds, an ingredient in pork and chicken marinades.

"I love the presentation of the food stands," says Donnie Masterton, 41, chef and co-owner of the Restaurant, arguably San Miguel's top culinary establishment. He is shopping at the market for that evening's eclectic menu: a chilled cauliflower soup with lemon grass and shrimp; duck with mole negro (a complex sauce based on chiles and herbs) and handmade tortillas; churros (a pencil-length fried-dough pastry) with dark Mexican chocolate pot-de-crème (a creamy custard). More than half the diners will be residents—Mexican, American and Canadian; the rest will be foreign or Mexican visitors. "It definitely won't be the same food they will get back in New York or Los Angeles," Masterton promises.

EXPATS AT THE PLATE

How did U.S. expats have fun in San Miguel de Allende in the 1940s? Baseball, among other things. See for yourself, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/sanmiguel

A Los Angeles native, Masterton settled in San Miguel six years ago, drawn by its beauty and the opportunity to own his own restaurant. The Restaurant occupies an inner courtyard under a retractable glass roof. "I wanted a seasonal menu with as many locally grown ingredients as possible," says Masterton. To meet his own standards, he purchased a quarter acre inside an organic farm outside San Miguel, where farmers harvest produce grown from seed: Swiss chard, bok choy, mache and

On November 2, the Day of the Dead, San Miguel's cemetery is ablaze with celebration. "One brings what the dead liked best in life—liquor, cigarettes, especially a favorite food," says local anthropologist Dehmian Barrales. "It's a bit like a birthday party."

arugula. His biggest complaint is the lack of fresh fish. "The quality is inconsistent," says Masterton. "I'm exploring the idea of phoning a fishing boat off the Pacific coast to order the fresh catch of the day."

CHERYL FINNEGAN CAME TO SAN MIGUEL in 2000 from San Francisco, where she had spent 14 years in the marketing department of Levi Strauss, the jeans and casual wear manufacturer. "One day I woke up and asked—Where is my passion? I had no passion," she recalls. "So I just dropped everything—my marriage, job, home, box seats at the opera—and moved down here."

A chance occurrence launched her new career. A decade ago, she was vacationing in the Mexican village of Sayulita, some 35 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta on the Pacific coast, during the annual December 12 celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. (The festival commemorates the day in 1531 when the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared on the outskirts of Mexico City.) As Finnegan strolled the town's central square, a fragment of fireworks hit her in the throat. A local doctor told her she would be permanently scarred. "The wound was shaped in the silhouette of [Our Lady of] Guadalupe, and when I walked around Sayulita, the villagers said it was a sign that I was her chosen one," says Finnegan. "Two weeks later, the wound disappeared without a scar—the doctor couldn't believe it!"

What remained was an obsession with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Finnegan began designing key chains, cameos, rings and belt buckles with the Virgin Mother's image, coated in resin and decorated with crystals. In 2004, paparazzi in the United States photographed pop singer Britney Spears wearing one of Finnegan's belts. "It put me on the map," says Finnegan. Other singers—Tim McGraw and Shakira—have sported Finnegan buckles.

Today she employs ten women to help run her jewelry and clothing accessories firm, housed in a restored 18th-century residence near the town center. Her designs, bearing tags with New Age slogans—"Everybody needs a miracle once in a while"—are sold throughout the United States, Europe and Asia under the name Virgins, Saints & Angels.

JORGE ALMADA, 37, is the grandson of Plutarco Elías Calles, a revolutionary general who served as president of Mexico in the 1920s. Almada and his French-American wife, Anne-Marie Midy, 38, met in New York City. After traveling across Mexico in search of artisan-made furnishings, the couple settled in San Miguel in 2000 and began designing furniture to

JONATHAN KANDELL *lives in New York City. Photographer* **ANN SUMMA** *is based in San Miguel de Allende and Los Angeles.*

HOLLY WILMETH

export to the United States and Europe under the Casamidy brand. "There is great artistry throughout Mexico," says Almada. "But we found San Miguel artisans to be the most open-minded and receptive to designer suggestions."

Refugio Rico García, 64, an ironsmith, is among the artisans employed by the couple. He lives and works in the same house in which he was born. The residence, a warren of rooms and tiny patios verdant with potted plants, scales a steep hillside. Photographs of his grandparents, faded to sepia, greet visitors in the foyer. "My grandfather was a potter—[he produced] pots and also sewage pipes, which used to be made of clay," says García. "He was the one who got me interested in becoming an artisan." (García's sons reject the life of an artisan as too lonely and demanding. The elder boy is a migrant worker in Arizona; the younger is a student.)

García labors up to 14 hours a day. The walls and ceiling of his workshop are blackened from the charcoal fires that fuel his forge. Near the furnace stands a heavy wooden table fitted with an iron plate; here he hammers half-molten metal into various shapes. García produces headboards for beds, chandeliers, and chairs and tables fitted with glass tops for Almada and Midy.

A bust of Dickinson looks toward San Miguel: "We owe [him] a debt of gratitude," says former mayor Villarreal.

The Hotel Oasis, a restored 18th-century house with four guest rooms, features Casamidy tables and chairs in an interior designed by Hong Kong-born Leslie Tung, a San Miguel decorator, and hotel owner Nancy Hooper. A native New Yorker and former Texas resident, Hooper acquired the property in 2006.

Widowed in the 1990s, Hooper decided to spend a summer in San Miguel with her teenage daughter, Tessa. "I wanted her to feel that life goes on and to give her a sense of new adventure," she says. In 2000, Hooper moved to San Miguel from Texas. She was intrigued by an abandoned house and a spacious room she could see through a window as she walked by. "It just wouldn't leave me alone—I knew I wanted to turn it into a hotel," says Hooper, who had no experience as an innkeeper. "From the beginning, I envisioned an oasis—a place where visitors to San Miguel could get away from the bustling outside."

BY THE EARLY 1980S, Dickinson had begun to distance himself from the growing number of Americans. "Stirling must have shuddered the day he saw the first tourist bus arrive in San Miguel and disgorge tourists wearing shorts," wrote biographer Virtue. "These were exactly the type of people he railed against in his own travels abroad." In 1983, Dickinson resigned as director of the Instituto Allende, where, during his 32-year tenure, some 40,000 students, mainly Americans, had matriculated. Increasingly involved with the Mexican community, he oversaw a rural library program that donated volumes from San Miguel residents to village schools. He also began to support financially the Patronato Pro Niños—the Pro-Children Foundation—an organization providing free medical service and shoes for impoverished rural youngsters.

On the night of October 27, 1998, the 87-year-old Dickinson was killed in a freak accident. As he prepared to drive away from a Patronato Pro Niños meeting held at a hillside house, he accidentally stepped on the gas pedal instead of the brake. His vehicle plunged down a steep embankment; Dickinson died instantly. More than 400 mourners, including foreigners and Mexicans from the countryside, attended his funeral. He was buried in the foreigners' section of Our Lady of Guadalupe Cemetery, just west of San Miguel's center. Today, a bronze bust of Dickinson stands on a street bearing his name.

The Guadalupe Cemetery attracts huge throngs on November 2, the Day of the Dead, when families of the deceased carry food and other gifts to their relatives' graves. "One brings what the dead liked best in life—liquor, cigarettes, especially a favorite food," says Dehmian Barrales, a local anthropologist. "It's a bit like a birthday party, and the family is saying to the dead: 'Here are your presents; we are here to keep you company.' The idea is to leave the food long enough for its essence to be consumed by the dead; its material form can be eaten by the living."

On a sunny November morning at the Guadalupe Cemetery, crowds shuffled through the white-walled entrance. Graves were festooned with orange cempasúchil blossoms, cut only on the Day of the Dead. Photographs of loved ones were propped against headstones. At one grave, a priest hired by relatives led prayers and psalms. At another, a mariachi band belted out the deceased's favorite Pedro Infante ballads, while relatives feasted on barbecued pork tacos and glasses of tequila that the dead had "left over."

The foreigners' section of the cemetery was empty of visitors, except for a small contingent of Mexicans and elderly Americans who clustered around a memorial fountain dedicated to Dickinson. The fountain, near his burial site, commands a view of the other graves. "He is watching over them," said Jorge Antonio Ramírez, 80, a retired Bellas Artes employee and former Dickinson baseball player, who had brought a cempasúchil bouquet to commemorate his friend. "Just like he always did in life."

PICTURING TOMORROW

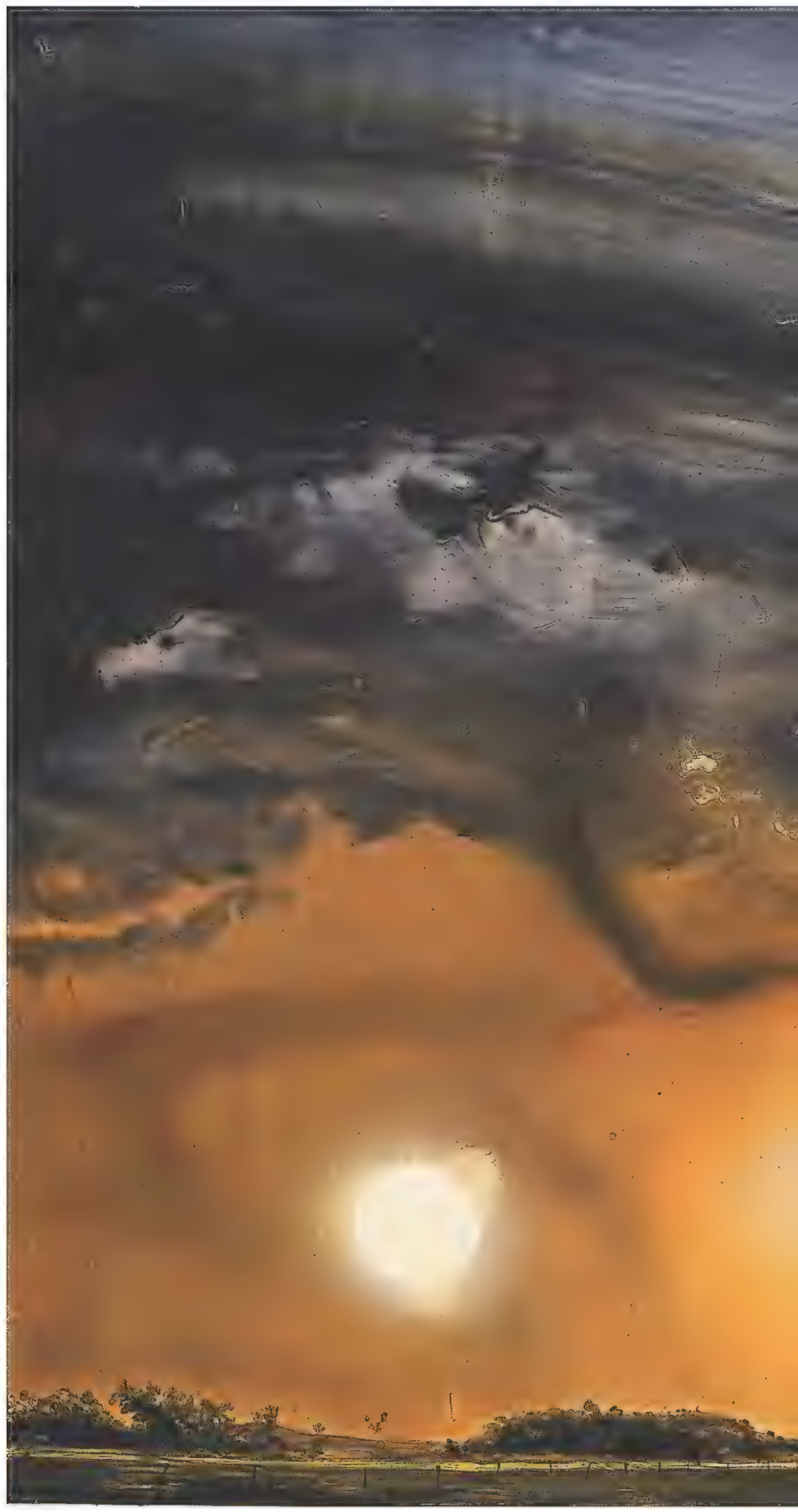
There's trouble ahead in Alexis Rockman's strangely compelling paintings

BY CATHLEEN McGUIGAN

"I TRY NOT TO COLLECT THINGS," Alexis Rockman says, standing in front of a glass-front cupboard in his white-walled studio in Lower Manhattan. The cabinet holds dead animals given to him by friends: a mongoose devouring a cobra, stuffed birds, a bat with outstretched wings, an armadillo. There's also a photograph of the artist at age 7, wearing a toothy smile as he holds up an Eastern box turtle. The passions of that little boy, who grew up in New York City haunting the American Museum of Natural History, are deeply embedded in his extravagantly beautiful, disquieting paintings of a post-apocalyptic natural world, for which the artist, now 48, is increasingly well known. If Rockman's early love of flora, fauna and museum dioramas has informed his grown-up work, so, too, has a boyish delight in monsters, sci-fi movies and popular culture.

Despite its displays of surrealistic wit, his art has long been freighted with a serious message about environmental degradation. "Rockman has been among the very few [artists] trying to understand the deep, mysterious, and crucial cleavage between the human and natural worlds," the environmentalist Bill McKibben wrote.

Now the artist is the subject of a major retrospective at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM). The catalog includes an essay by his friend Thomas Lovejoy, the scientist who first used the term "biological diversity." "His vision is based on a real understanding of what's going on," Lovejoy says of Rockman's paintings. "It's a surrealism that is seriously anchored in reality." The two met in 1998 after Rockman made several paintings to accompany an article on the Ama-



LANDON NORDEMAN; PP. 84-85 COURTESY BALDWIN GALLERY, ASPEN

Many works by Rockman (opposite: in his New York City studio with his dog Padme) are "a portent of events to come," says curator Joanna Marsh. The artist's 2006 *Hurricane and Sun* (below) suggests menacing weather.

zon basin that Lovejoy wrote for *Natural History* magazine.

"Alexis is an exceptional painter," says Joanna Marsh, the museum's curator of contemporary art, "and his interest in the environment, in natural history and in 19th-century landscape painting resonates with our museum collection and the Smithsonian-wide emphasis on natural science and biodiversity."

Rockman, who is tall and square-jawed, describes his childhood as one devoted less to studying than drawing and basketball, which he still plays. But a concern for the larger world was part of his upbringing by "hippie parents," as he calls them. His mother is an urban archaeologist; his late father was a jazz musician. After a stint at the Rhode Island School of Design, Rockman earned a B.F.A. at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. When he began his career as a painter, in the 1980s, the idea of realism was so far out of fashion he thought of his offbeat landscapes as conceptual art.

Three epic murals that help define the painter's trajectory anchor the SAAM show of 47 artworks. *Evolution* (1992), a bright and riotous primeval landscape, with a nasty swamp and a spewing volcano, is alive with mutant and prehistoric creatures. *Manifest Destiny* (2004) is a strangely gorgeous depiction of Brooklyn, New York, far in the future, when global warming has reduced it to a toxic wetland. And *South* (2008), inspired by a trip to Antarctica, is what the artist calls "a group portrait of ice"; painted with oil on paper, it is looser and lighter than his earlier, densely detailed paintings. He used a similar technique in two of his "weather drawings" in 2006, the eerie *Hurricane and Sun*, with its sickly yellow disk dimming beneath a spiraling gray tempest, and *Calving Glacier*.

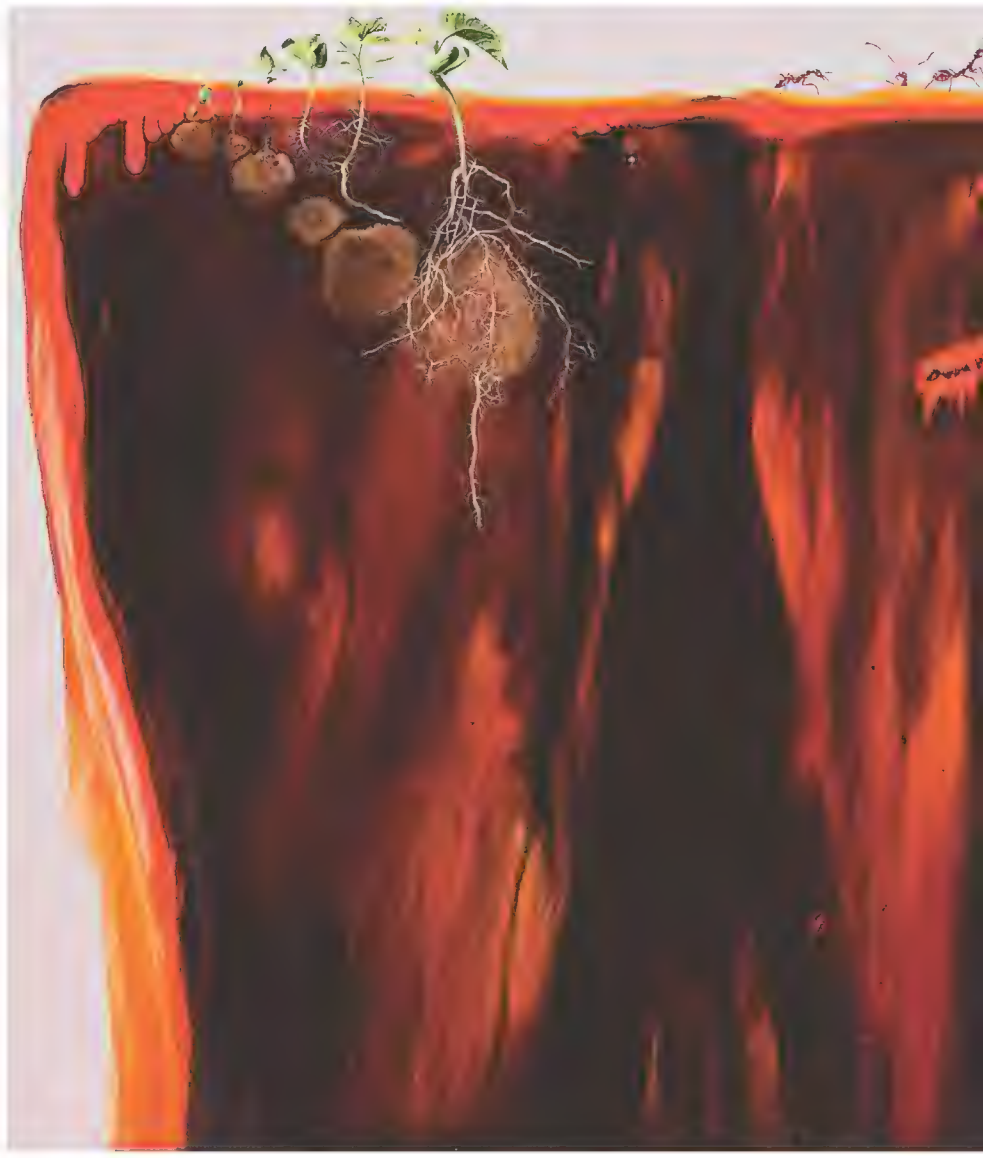
APOCALYPSE NOW

New York City is a toxic wetland in *Manifest Destiny*. View this work and others from the Alexis Rockman show, and share this story, at smith.hy.pr/rockman

A world-class eco-tourist, Rockman has also trekked to Guyana, Tasmania and Madagascar to research his work. But he creates the actual paintings in his studio, based on his photographs, sometimes manipulated with Photoshop software, and images he culls from the Internet. He has consulted scientists and architects, too, who suggest what a horrifically degraded future might look like for paintings such as *Washington Square*.

Recently he finished a big painting called *Mesopotamia* for the new U.S. embassy in Baghdad. It depicts the Tigris-Euphrates ecosystem before civilization. And he is fulfilling his boyhood passion for movies and animation by collaborating on sequences for director Ang Lee's film version of *Life of Pi*. The more distant future seems less certain. "I have no idea what I'm going to be doing, let alone anyone else," he says. "But I hope there's enough energy and time to make art, if civilization still exists."

CATHLEEN MCGUIGAN, *who is based in New York City and writes about the arts, profiled Alex Katz in the August 2009 issue.*



COURTESY BALDWIN GALLERY, ASPEN; PP. 86-87 COURTESY ALEXIS ROCKMAN; COURTESY NYEHAUS

Deeply concerned about environmental degradation and global warming, Rockman has said his images "remind us we haven't stepped outside of our biological contract, our own evolutionary history." Clockwise from top left: A Manhattan landmark is partly submerged by rising seas in *Washington Square (*2004). *Calving Glacier* (2006) evokes the immensity of the world's ice caps and the threat of their melting. His painterly *Loam* (2008) seems to blend natural history and Abstract Expressionism.

PRESENCE OF MIND

The Egyptian queen (in a 19th-century engraving) sneaked back from exile and surprised Julius Caesar.

GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Rehabilitating Cleopatra

Egypt's ruler was more than the sum of the seductions that loom so large in history—and in Hollywood **BY STACY SCHIFF**

CLEOPATRA VII RULED EGYPT for 21 years a generation before the birth of Christ. She lost her kingdom once; regained it; nearly lost it again; amassed an empire; lost it all. A goddess as a child, a queen at 18, at the height of her power she controlled virtually the entire eastern Mediterranean coast, the last great kingdom of any Egyptian ruler. For a fleeting moment she held the fate of the Western world in her hands. She had a child with a married man, three more with another. She died at 39. Catastrophe reliably cements a reputation, and Cleopatra's end was sudden and sensational. In one of the busiest afterlives in history, she has become an asteroid, a video game, a cigarette, a slot machine, a strip club, a synonym for Elizabeth Taylor. Shakespeare attested to Cleopatra's infinite variety. He had no idea.

If the name is indelible, the image is blurry. She may be one of the most recognizable figures in history, but we have little idea what Cleopatra actually looked like. Only her coin portraits—issued in her lifetime, and which she likely approved—can be accepted as authentic. We remember her, too, for the wrong reasons. A capable, clear-eyed sovereign, she knew how to build a fleet, suppress an insurrection, control a currency. One of Mark Antony's most trusted generals vouched for her political acumen. Even at a time when female rulers were no rarity, Cleopatra stood out, the sole woman of her world to rule alone. She was incompara-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 92

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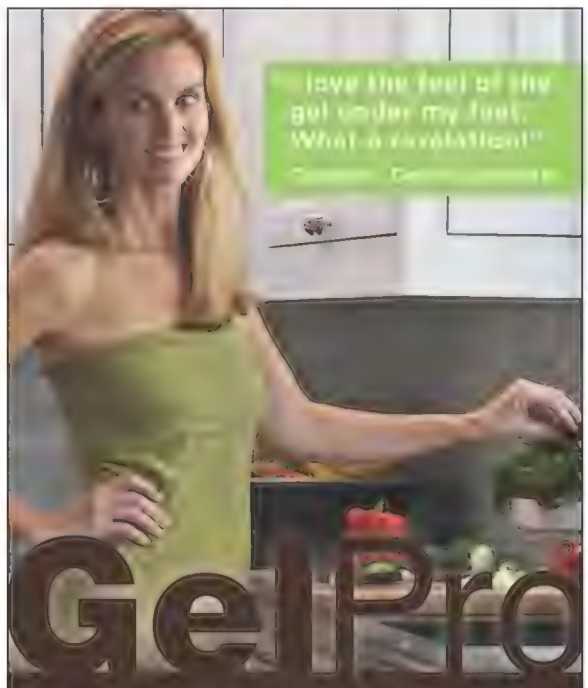

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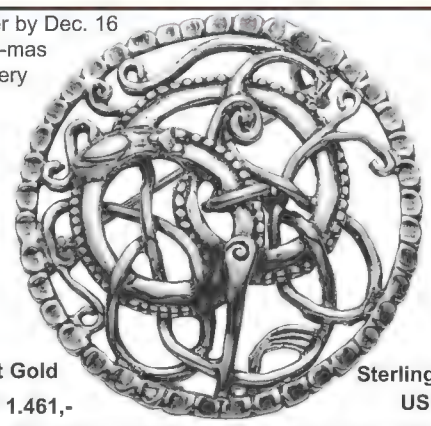

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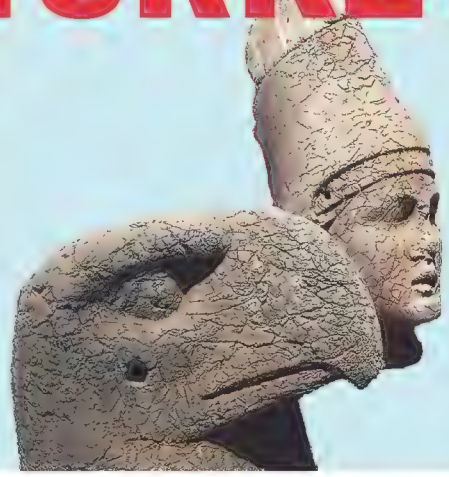

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 88

bly richer than anyone else in the Mediterranean. And she enjoyed greater prestige than every other woman of her time, as an excitable rival king was reminded when he called for her assassination during her stay at his court. (The king's advisers demurred. In light of her stature, they reminded Herod, it could not be done.) Cleopatra descended from a long line of murderers and upheld the family tradition, but was for her time and place remarkably well behaved.

She nonetheless survives as a wanton temptress, not the first time a genuinely powerful woman has been transmuted into a shamelessly seductive one. She elicited scorn and envy in equal and equally distorting measure; her story is constructed as much of male fear as of fantasy. Her power was immediately misrepresented because—for one man's historical purposes—she needed to have reduced another to abject slavery. Ultimately everyone from Michelangelo to Brecht got a crack at her. The Renaissance was obsessed with her, the Romantics even more so.

Like all lives that lend themselves to poetry, Cleopatra's was one of dislocations and disappointments. She grew up amid unsurpassed luxury and inherited a kingdom in decline. For ten generations her family, the Ptolemies, had styled themselves pharaohs. They were in fact Macedonian Greek, which makes Cleopatra about as Egyptian as Elizabeth Taylor. She and her 10-year-old brother assumed control of a country with a weighty past and a wobbly future. The pyramids, to which Cleopatra almost certainly introduced Julius Caesar, already sported graffiti. The Sphinx had undergone a major restoration—more than 1,000 years earlier. And the glory of the once-great Ptolemaic empire had dimmed. Over the course of Cleopatra's childhood Rome extended its rule nearly to Egypt's borders. The implications for the last great kingdom in that sphere of influence were clear. Its ruler had no choice but to court the

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Cleopatra's image on Egyptian coins is likely her most authentic portrait.

most powerful Roman of the day—a bewildering assignment in the late Republic, wracked as it was by civil wars.

Cleopatra's father had thrown in his lot with Pompey the Great. Good fortune seemed eternally to shine on that brilliant Roman general, at least until Julius Caesar dealt him a crushing defeat in central Greece. Pompey fled to Egypt, where in 48 B.C. he was stabbed and decapitated. Twenty-one-year-old Cleopatra was at the time a fugitive in the Sinai—on the losing side of a civil war against her brother and at the mercy of his troops and advisers. Quickly she managed to ingratiate herself with the new master of the Roman world.

Julius Caesar arrived in Alexandria days after Pompey's murder. He barricaded himself in the Ptolemies' palace, the home from which Cleopatra had been exiled. From the desert she engineered a clandestine return, skirting enemy lines and Roman barricades, arriving after dark inside a sturdy sack. Over the succeeding months she stood at Caesar's side—pregnant with his child—while he battled her brother's troops. With their defeat, Caesar restored her to the throne.

For the next 18 years Cleopatra governed the most fertile country in the Mediterranean, guiding it through plague and famine. Her tenure alone speaks to her guile. She knew she could be removed at any time by Rome, deposed by her subjects, undermined by her advisers—or stabbed, poisoned and dismembered by her own family. In possession of a first-rate education, she

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The Battle of Actium (depicted in a 19th-century engraving) helped seal Mark Antony's fate—and Cleopatra's image.

played to two constituencies: the Greek elite, who initially viewed her with disfavor, and the native Egyptians, to whom she was a divinity and a pharaoh. She had her hands full. Not only did she command an army and navy, negotiate with foreign powers and preside over temples, she also dispensed justice and regulated an economy. Like Isis, one of the most popular deities of the day, Cleopatra was seen as the beneficent guardian of her subjects. Her reign is notable for the absence of revolts in the Egyptian countryside, quieter than it had been for a century and a half.

Meanwhile the Roman civil wars raged on, as tempers flared between Mark Antony, Caesar's protégé, and Octavian, Caesar's adopted son. Repeatedly the two men divided the Roman world between them. Cleopatra ultimately allied herself with Antony, with whom she had three children; together the two appeared to lay out plans for an eastern Roman empire. Antony and Octavian's fragile peace came to an end in 31 B.C., when Octavian declared war—on Cleopatra. He knew Antony would not abandon the Egyptian queen. He

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knew too that a foreign menace would rouse a Roman public that had long lost its taste for civil war. The two sides ultimately faced off at Actium, a battle less impressive as a military engagement than for its political ramifications. Octavian prevailed. Cleopatra and Antony retreated to Alexandria. After prolonged negotiation, Antony's troops defected to Octavian.

A year later Octavian marched an army to Egypt to extend his rule, claim his spoils and transport the villain of the piece back to Rome, as a prisoner. Soundly defeated, Cleopatra could negotiate only the form of her surrender. She barricaded herself in a vast seaside mausoleum. The career that had begun with a brazen act of defiance ended with another; for the second time she slipped through a set of enemy fingers. Rather than deliver herself to Octavian, she committed suicide. Very likely she enlisted a gentle poison rather than an asp. Octavian was at once disappointed and in awe of his enemy's "lofty spirit." Cleopatra's was an honorable death, a dignified death, an exemplary death. She had presided over it herself, proud and unbroken to the end. By the Roman definition she had at last done something right; finally it was to Cleopatra's credit that she had defied the expectations of her sex. With her death the

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Claudette Colbert (with Henry Wilcoxon as Mark Antony, 1934) was invited to play "the wickedest woman in history."

Roman civil wars came to an end. So too did the Ptolemaic dynasty. In 30 B.C. Egypt became a province of Rome. It would not recover its autonomy until the 20th century A.D.

Can anything good be said of a woman who slept with the two most powerful men of her time? Possibly, but not in an age when Rome controlled the narrative. Cleopatra stood at one of the most dangerous intersections in history: that of women and power. Clever women, Euripides had warned 400 years earlier, were dangerous. We do not know whether Cleopatra loved either Antony or Caesar, but we do know that she got them to do her bidding. From the Roman point of view, she "enslaved" them both. Already it was a zero-sum game: a woman's authority spelled a man's deception.

To a Roman, Cleopatra was thrice suspect, once for hailing from a culture known—as Cicero had it—for its "fribbling, fawning ways," again for her Alexandrian address, lastly for her staggering wealth. A Roman could not pry apart the exotic and the erotic; Cleopatra was a stand-in for the occult, alchemical East, for her sinuous, sensuous land, as perverse and original as its astonishment of a river. Men who came in contact with her seem to have lost

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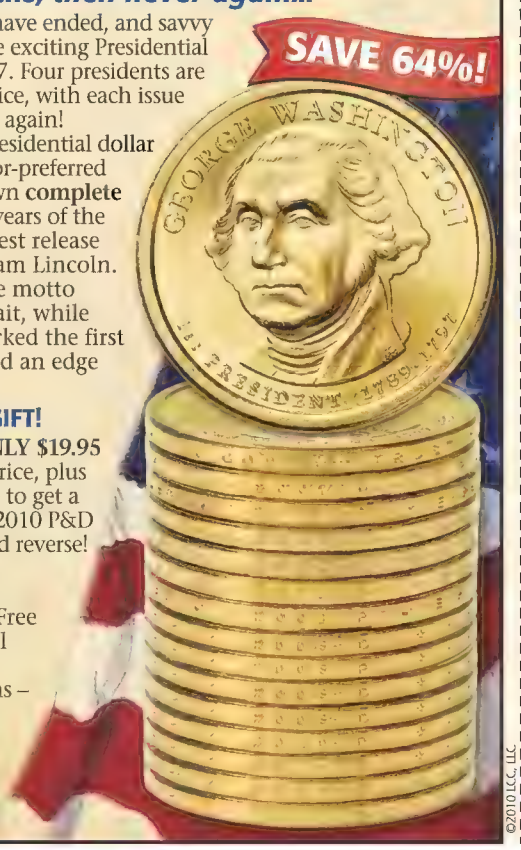

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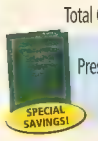

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their heads, or at least to have rethought their agendas. The siren call of the East long predated her, but no matter: she hailed from the intoxicating land of sex and excess. It is not difficult to understand why Caesar became history, Cleopatra a legend.

Her story differs from most women's stories in that the men who shaped it enlarged rather than erased her role, for their own reasons. Her relationship with Antony was the longest of her life—the two were together for the better part of 11 years—but her relationship with Octavian proved the most enduring. He made much of his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, delivering to Rome the tabloid version of an Egyptian queen, insatiable, treacherous, bloodthirsty, power-crazed. Octavian magnified Cleopatra to hyperbolic proportions to do the same with his victory—and to smuggle Mark Antony, his real enemy and former brother-in-law, out of the picture.

As Antony was erased from the record, Actium was wondrously transformed into a major engagement, a resounding victory, a historical turning point. Octavian had rescued Rome from great peril. He had resolved the civil war; he had restored peace after 100 years of unrest. Time began anew. To read the official historians, it is as if with his return the Italian peninsula burst—after a crippling, ashen century of violence—into Technicolor, the crops sitting suddenly upright, crisp and plump, in the fields. "Validity was restored to the laws, authority to the courts, and dignity to the senate," proclaims the historian Velleius.

The years after Actium were a time of extravagant praise and lavish myth-making. Cleopatra was particularly ill-served; the turncoats wrote the history. Her career coincided as well with a flowering of Latin literature. It was Cleopatra's curse to inspire its great poets, happy to expound on her shame, in a language inhospitable to her. Horace celebrated her defeat before it had occurred. She helpfully illuminated one of the poet Propertius's favorite points: a man in love is a help-

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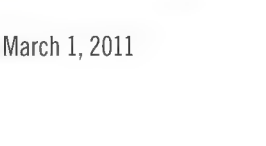

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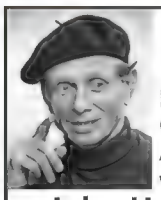

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Life reflected legend when Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton began their affair on the set of *Cleopatra* (1963).

less man, painfully subservient to his mistress. It was as if Octavian had delivered Rome from that ill as well. He restored the natural order of things. Men ruled women, and Rome ruled the world. On both counts Cleopatra was crucial to the story. She stands among the few losers whom history remembers, if for the wrong reasons. For the next century, the Oriental influence and the emancipation of women would keep the satirists in business.

Propertius set the tone, dubbing Cleopatra "the whore queen." She would later become "a woman of insatiable sexuality and insatiable avarice" (Dio), "the whore of the eastern kings" (Boccaccio). She was a carnal sinner for Dante, for Dryden a poster child for unlawful love. A first-century A.D. Roman would falsely assert that "ancient writers repeatedly speak of Cleopatra's insatiable libido." Florence Nightingale referred to her as "that disgusting Cleopatra." Offering Claudette Colbert the title role in the 1934 movie, Cecile B. DeMille is said to have asked, "How would you like to be the wickedest woman in history?"

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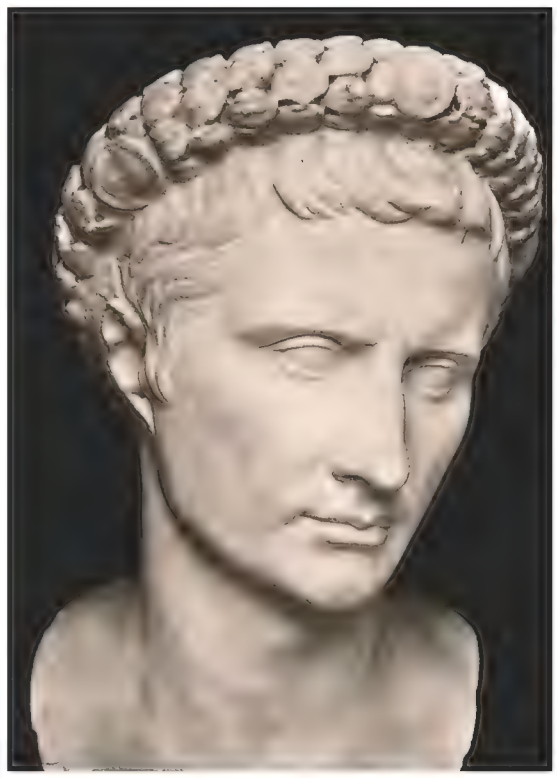

After Actium, Octavian began inflating Cleopatra's supposed villainy in order to magnify his victory in Roman eyes.

complished in doing so: that she sustained a vast, rich, densely populated empire in its troubled twilight. A commanding woman versed in politics, diplomacy and governance, fluent in nine languages, silver-tongued and charismatic, she has dissolved into a joint creation of the Roman propagandists and the Hollywood directors. She endures for having seduced two of the greatest men of her time, while her crime was in fact to have entered into the same partnerships that every man in power enjoyed. That she did so in reverse and in her own name made her deviant, socially disruptive, an unnatural woman. She is left to put a vintage label on something we have always known existed: potent female sexuality.

It has forever been preferable to attribute a woman's success to her beauty rather than to her brains, to reduce her to the sum of her sex life. Against a powerful enchantress there is no contest. Against a woman who ensnares a man in the coils of her serpentine intelligence—in her ropes of pearls—there should, at least, be some kind of antidote. Cleopatra would unsettle more as sage than as seductress; it is less threatening to believe her fatally attractive than fatally intelligent. As one of Caesar's murderers noted, "How much

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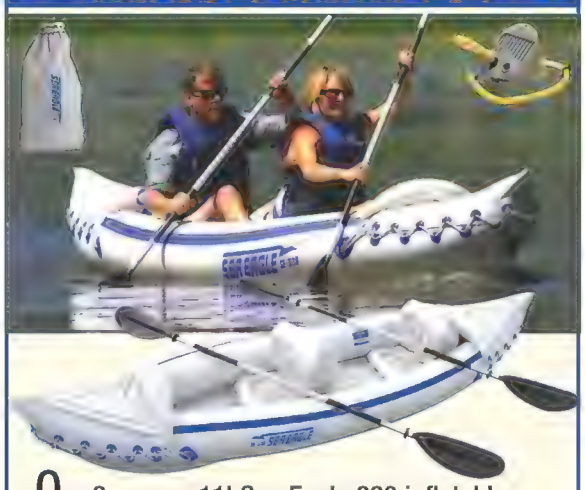

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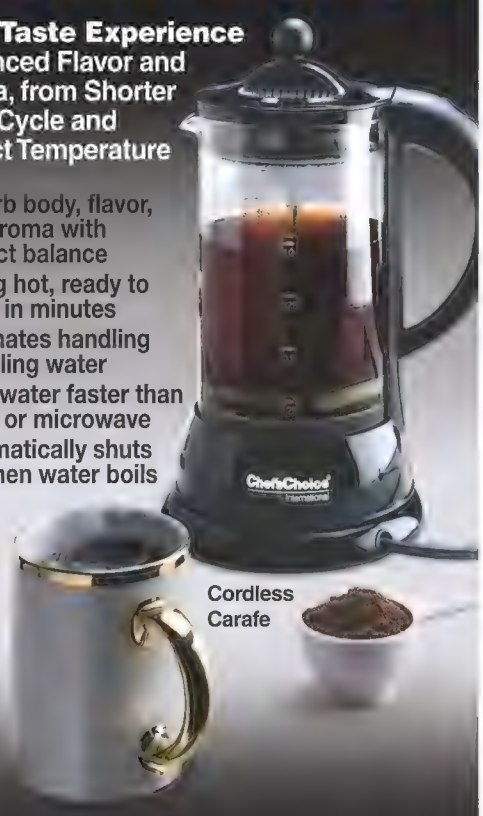

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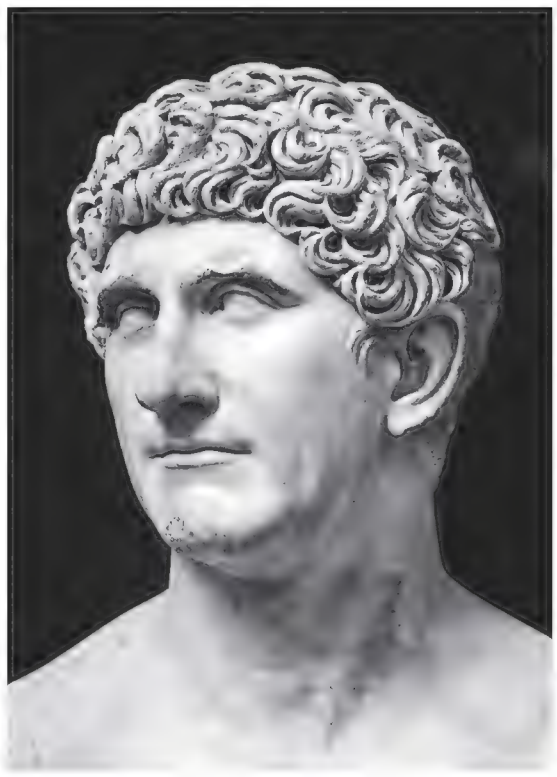

Mark Antony and Cleopatra had three children together, and may also have had plans for an Eastern Roman empire.

more attention people pay to their fears than to their memories!"

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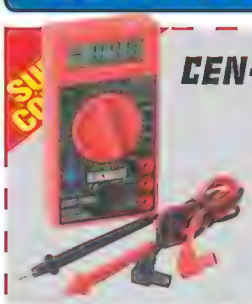

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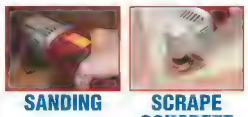

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Daughter Knows Best

Kids have discovered a diabolical new use for science: rebutting their parents

BY JOE QUEENAN

A FEW WEEKS AGO I made a last-ditch effort to get my son to make his bed in the morning. We'd been having the same argument for 23 years, and now that he was going off to law school I thought it was time for him to shape up. I honestly believed that people who left their bed unmade would never be successful in life—that an unmade bed signified sloth, indifference and lack of moral character. Winston Churchill always made his bed.

Martha Washington always made her bed. Conversely, Helen of Troy never made her bed. Neither did Attila the Hun or Al Capone. I was sure of it.

One morning, I arrived at my office to find an e-mail from my son with the message, "Ha! The tables have turned!" Opening the attached document, I found an article discussing why sleeping in an unmade bed was healthier than sleeping in a made one. According to a study published by Kingston University in London, a disheveled bed enables pockets of moisture in a mattress to dry out faster—thereby dehydrating and killing dust mites and other massively annoying creatures. Since my son has allergies, making his bed in the morning could literally make him sick.

This was not the first time my son had pulled a stunt like this. For years he'd been citing studies that homework was bad for kids or that people who played video games were more attentive and thus made better drivers. If I fired back that playing video games wrecked one's eyesight, he'd trot out a study proving that they improved a person's field of vision.

What these experiences drive home is that the information age is the bane of all conscientious parents. If you try to tell your kid to mow the lawn, he will cite a study published in *Geophysical Research Letters* indicating that the amount of fuel used in cutting a small lawn does disproportionate damage to the planet, so it would be better to leave it untended. If you try to persuade your children that "early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," they will dig up a study in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* indicating that students who get up at the crack of dawn lose their zip early in the day, while those who remain snuggled up beneath the covers long after sunrise maintain a high level of productivity well into the evening.

The worst thing about all this is the source of my son's information. His sister, who is in the neuroscience PhD program at Georgetown, is the one who funneled him the report about unmade beds. His sister is the one who found the study linking video games with improved vision. In discussions of this nature, his sister is both instigator and umpire, because she never allows an opinion to stand unless it can pass scientific muster—which wrecks things for people like me, who rely on conventional wisdom and common sense.

I have now officially given up trying to get my son to empty the dishwasher, put gas in my car or pay for the five boxes of cereal he eats every time he comes home. I know that he will merely text his sister and get her to produce a study proving that dishes are more germ-resistant if they remain in the dishwasher, that cars are more fuel-efficient when running on empty and that parents who constantly complain about their children's finances have short life expectancies.

This is what I get for having a daughter who's a scientist. If I return to this planet in some future life and again have kids, I hope they're a pair of screwballs. Maybe then I'll be able to get one of them to mow the lawn.

JOE QUEENAN, *the author of nine books, writes regularly for the* New York Times, *the* Los Angeles Times *and the* Guardian.

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